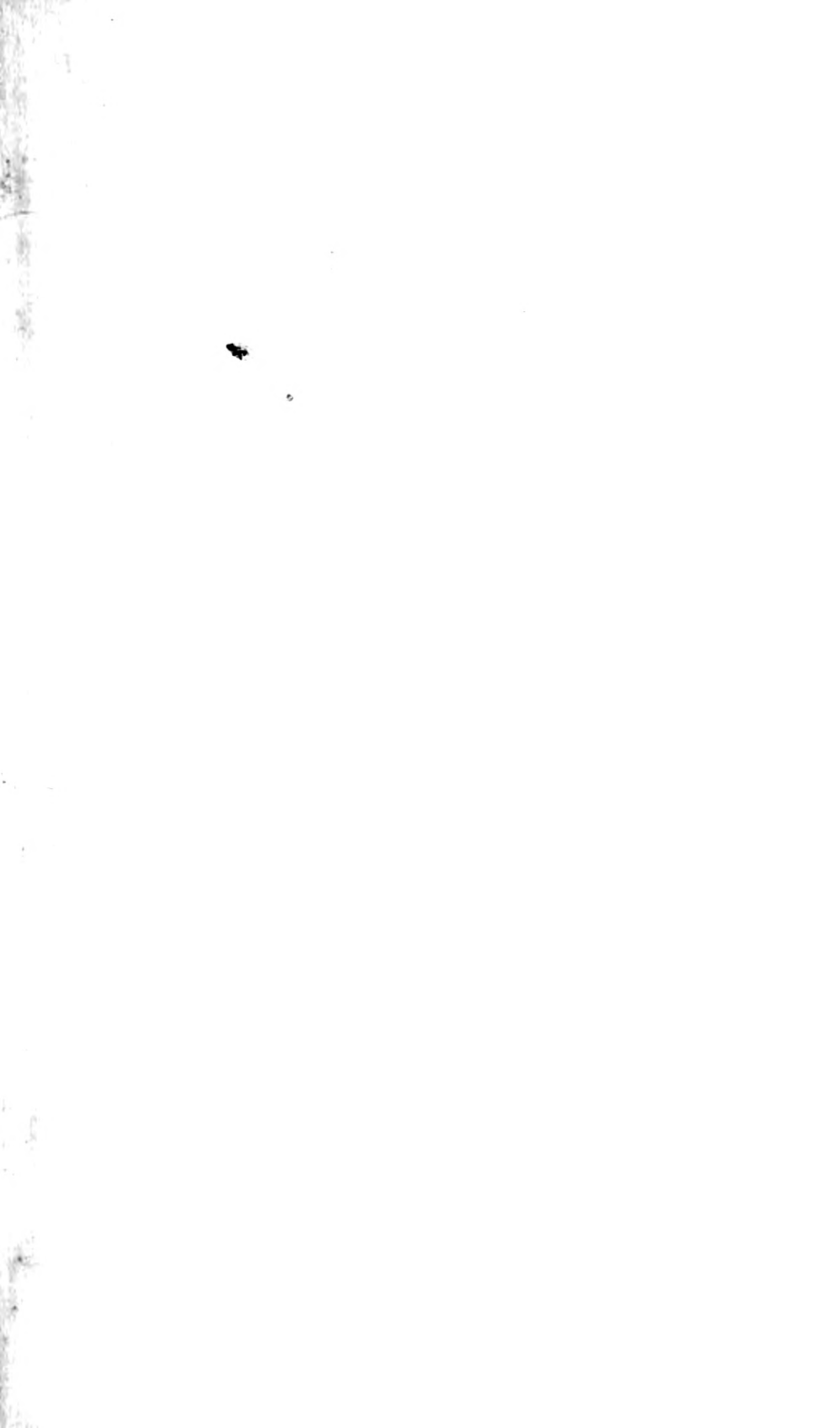
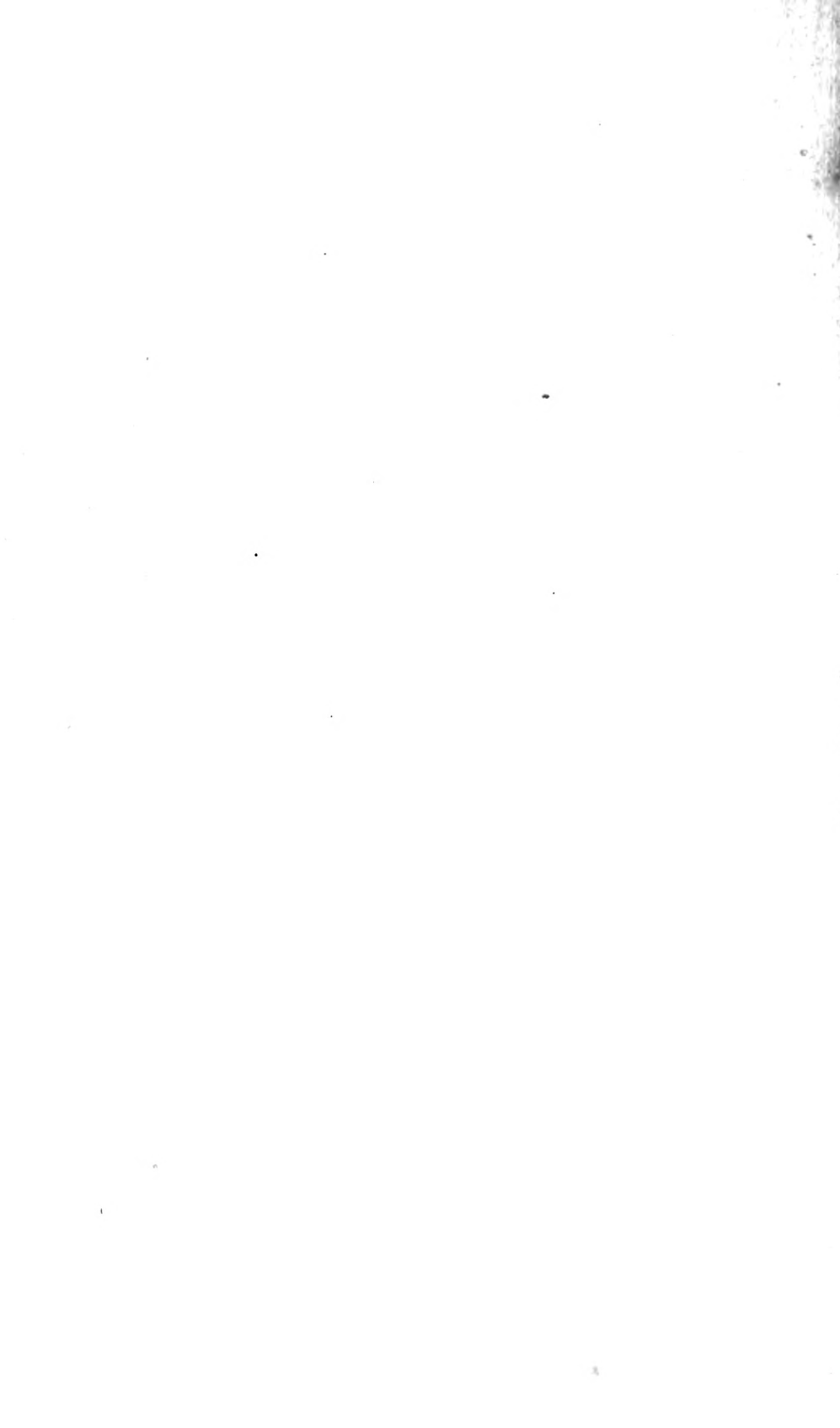


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WALTER GORING.



WALTER GORING.

A Story.

BY

ANNIE THOMAS,

AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "ON GUARD," "THEO LEIGH," ETC.

"And yet, believe me, good as well as ill,
Woman's at best a contradiction still."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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WALTER GORING.

CHAPTER I.

VERY STRANGE!

YOUNG Mrs. Fellowes had a very tender conscience. Hard as it may be for those immaculate ones who never go wrong through impulse to believe it, the impulsive sinners get a goodly portion of their hell upon earth. Remorse is very apt to set in with them even before that for which they feel remorseful is fairly accomplished. Consequently they have not so much pleasure even as an undivided interest in their current fault or folly might give them.

Charlie was no exception to this hapless general rule. Her first evening's experience of The Hurst was a bitter one. It was made as miserable to her as a brace of captious, jealous, narrow-minded women, who yet have a certain amount of right on

their side, alone can make it. They meant her to feel sundry things, and she felt them forthwith as fully as they could desire. They intended her to remember that she had gained much, and given nothing in this marriage. That she had brought no grist to the mill. That they had been happy before she came, and were not happy now that she was there. That they had the first right to the allegiance of their son and brother! All these things Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah thought it well that Charlie should feel at once; and all these things she felt without the smallest hesitation under their efficient treatment.

Her first night in her new home was as hopeless, sleepless, miserable a one as she ever remembered to have passed. Her nerves and her conscience had it all their own way with her. She raked up all the meaner motives by which she had been actuated in this marriage, and reviewed them sternly, and wept in her soul, owning that Nemesis had overtaken her justly. She knew that she had accepted this man's love because it had opened to her a means of escape from a weary, tedious, joyless home. She knew that it was the desire to have an establishment and a stand-point of her

own which had led her to say "Yes," when Henry Fellowes offered her his honest unselfish love. He had put his whole capital into the firm, and she had come forward with a false promissory note, knowing that it was just a toss-up whether or not it would be eventually dishonoured. She had thought of the home she would have—of the position she would fill—of the taste she would be free to exercise as the idolised wife of a rich man. Now Nemesis had overtaken her. She was distrusted and disliked by his nearest relatives, and she owed to herself that had they known the truth concerning her motives in marrying him, their dislike and distrust would have been founded on good grounds. She was made to feel herself a mere cipher in the house where she had meant to rule a little queen. She was doomed to uncongenial companionship, from which she had not the smallest prospect of escaping; and she knew that she deserved it all, and acknowledged, that though hard, these things were but just; for she had come to like her husband now, and so understood the nature of the sin she had sinned against him in marrying him merely for the furtherance of her own social aims.

She resolved—sensibly enough—that he should

remain in ignorance of the lax regard she had had for him in those first days when he had been brimming over with love for her. The knowledge of it could do him no good—might possibly do him harm, in that it might render him a prey to suspicions of her all his life. Praiseworthy as it is to cry *mea culpa*, it is perhaps just as well to say it in a still small voice to oneself alone. To utter it aloud is noble, but rash. He should remain in ignorance of that early lax regard, and for the future his happiness and his honour should be all in all to her. She would concentrate all her energies in furthering the former and redounding to the latter. She would bear and forbear for his sake—bow the neck gracefully to his mother, and suffer his sister with meek smiles. She would be as nothing in The Hurst—The Hurst!—to be mistress of which she had married him. So, eventually, Nemesis might be appeased, and the mercenary motive of her marriage forgiven her.

It was easy to come to these resolutions, and to feel humble, not to say abject, in the night, when she was worn out with remorse, sleeplessness, and disappointment. But Charlie was a high-spirited girl, full of vitality and impatient of con-

trol, stupidity, injustice, and other wearisome things. She knew herself, though she did make these resolutions, and vow to adhere to them, that she would be subjected to a thousand temptations to break or fling them aside ; and she could not go to her husband to strengthen and aid her ! For she knew that a recital of the resolutions might possibly lead to conjectures as to the reason for forming them. High-spirited as Charlie was, she did shrink from placing the fact before her husband that when she married him he was little more to her than a necessary but uncoveted appendage to The Hurst. The heart of a man is delicate ground to travel over. He might not find all-sufficient compensation for this fact in the one that now she had grown to regard and estimate him properly.

It was easy to come to these resolutions in the night ; but uncommonly hard to hold to them in the daytime. Henry Fellowes left his wife very much to her own devices the day after his return home. He farmed his own land, and he had been away from it for some time, therefore he was naturally desirous of seeing how things had gone upon it as soon as possible. Consequently directly

after breakfast he went out, and Charlie was left to herself.

She had asked him before he left, "If he would show her the house?" and he had replied, "Oh, yes! or Dinah will, won't you, Dinah?" which was not at all the same kind of thing. However, when her brother was fairly off, Miss Dinah bore down upon her sister-in-law with a big basket of keys in her hand, and told Mrs. Fellowes, junior, that if she wanted to see The Hurst she must do so at once?

"Perhaps I could find my way about by myself," Charlie answered, unwarily, "I don't want to trouble you." To which Miss Dinah replied, that "they didn't like to have people running in and out of the rooms, and therefore they kept them locked." Hearing this, Charlie subsided into silence, and followed the gaunt creature, feeling very sorry for herself.

It was a dreary progress that they made. The majority of the bedrooms were locked, and when they were opened they smelt and looked like sepulchres. They had all been furnished solemnly, and their shutters were all closed. In addition to this lively treatment, they were, one and all, the shrine for huge funereal urns, in which the corpses

of roses and other flowers, that had once been sweet and fair, were buried with bits of bay salt. Charlie could not help lowering her voice in these rooms, and feeling more of a miserable sinner than ever. Anything more subduing than the spectacle of the bed and window curtains, all done up in pale holland shrouds, it is difficult to imagine.

"Are they never used?" Charlie asked, when they came out of the fourth deserted room.

"Never; but they are swept every week," Miss Dinah replied. "We are very particular about *that*; and as I always keep the doors locked, no one can go in, so the furniture keeps beautifully. If one isn't very careful, things soon go to rack and ruin in housekeeping."

Charlie tried to look wise on the subject.

"So my sister found," she said. "Ellen has been married eight years, and she has furnished her drawing-room twice."

"Rather extravagant, unless her husband got a fortune with her, I think," Miss Dinah replied, fixing Charlie severely with her maiden eye. "Well, you have seen all the up-stairs rooms now, with the exception of my mother's and mine. I suppose you don't want to see them?"

"No, thank you," Charlie replied hurriedly, "I'll go down into the drawing-room. I'm so much obliged to you for having shown me the house."

"Won't you find it cold in the drawing-room?" Miss Dinah asked. She had been on the point of walking away, but she turned round and looked at Charlie as she asked this.

"Oh, no! I'll have a good fire made up, thank you."

"We never have a fire in the drawing-room in the morning," Miss Dinah said, decidedly. "The dining-room is well warmed and much more comfortable, *we* think; besides, my brother Henry is accustomed to find us there when he comes in at eleven, and he won't like any change made." She walked off when she had said this, and Charlie stood gazing after her in a half-bewildered way. "I don't like to ask him—he will think me so inquisitive, as he has never told me; but the place must belong as much to them as it does to my husband. Why on earth did he bring me here to be *nothing*!"

For about an hour Charlie went and sat in her dull, ugly bedroom. "It might be made so pretty!" she thought as she looked at the big bay window,

which it had in common with many another room in The Hurst—"it might be made so pretty! And then in the summer I should have some place in which I could sit, without feeling uncomfortable. I wonder if there's a library!" She started up as she thought this, and ran down-stairs. In the hall she saw a servant on her knees, sweeping up dust that was not there. "Where's the library, or study?—there is one?" she asked; and the girl replied,

"That's the door down at the end of that passage, M'm; shall I get the key from Miss Dinah?"

"Oh, no!" Charlie answered. She felt intuitively that the library would not be worth the key; besides, she was chilled and dispirited by her long sojourn upstairs. So she walked into the dining-room, and seated herself in a chair by the fire, and tried not to see Mrs. Fellowes' irritating expression of being hard at work mending stockings.

The old lady had taken no notice of her daughter-in-law on her entrance. She had gone on darning the stockings without even so much as looking up; but Charlie had seen the ungracious look deepen on her face, and once more my heroine's

tender conscience smote her keenly. "Supposing some instinct should have taught her that I married Harry without caring a bit for him?" she thought. "No wonder she hates me—I hate myself." Then she sat and watched Mrs. Fellowes' grim face till its intense unpleasantness goaded her into speech.

"Are you not feeling well this morning?" she asked as gently as she could.

"Quite as well as I ever can expect to feel, thank you," Mrs. Fellowes answered tartly. "I have not much in this world to make me feel well, or look well," she added, as though she rather expected to be rewarded by looking robust when she was disembodied. The reply not being framed in such a way as to make a continuance of that subject pleasant, Charlie tried another.

"I like the house very much—what I have seen of it."

"Do you?"

"Yes, very much. When my husband comes in, I shall make him take me into the library, and round to the stables and gardens. I want to know all about my home as soon as I can. I wish he would make haste in!"

"Don't you think it would be better if you

employed yourself with something useful, Mrs. Henry, instead of idling about, as you have been, all the morning? When your husband comes in, he will be better pleased to see you with some work in your hands, than to have you wanting to run about in the damp."

"He won't see me with any work in my hands," Charlie replied, laughing. "Needles are things I never interfere with by any chance."

"I'm only glad," Mrs. Fellowes rejoined, with snappish emphasis, "that you have always been so well able to afford to pay people to do your work for you; in *this* family we're *obliged* to do many things that we don't quite like."

Charlie rose quickly, and got herself away out of the room. "I can't stand it another morning!" she thought, as she ran up for her hat and shawl. "I would rather get frost-bitten than sit in the room with that horrid grim old woman. How shall I live through it, if my husband means always to be out of the house?" Then she went out, and walked about in the damp November air, because there was no corner in her husband's home where she could be at peace. There was no unkind feeling towards the man she had married, in her heart;

nevertheless, she did think within herself, "It would have been better for me to have tried the other path—the path that Walter Goring pointed out. I shall get blighted here—God help me!"

Her sensations were rather curious than agreeable as she walked along over the land of which her husband was lord—walked along it for the first time. There was none of the usual womanly elation of heart at being the wife of a man who had a stake in the country. On the contrary, there was considerable depression. The sense of her own insignificance came over her strongly as she sauntered slowly over the soil, and felt, "All this is his!—and I can't have a fire when I want it!—and am told by an old woman whom I never saw till yesterday, that I ought to be ashamed of myself because I'm not fond of darning stockings! I know it would be better for us all in the end if I only stood up, and asserted myself; but——"

"But" conscience makes cowards of us all. She could not stand up and assert herself to the mother of the man whom she had used as a ladder—a thing by means of which she had hoped to climb out of obscurity. Perhaps a better woman than Charlie St. John would never have done this;

but, unquestionably, no woman, however good in deed, could have more bitterly—more humbly—repented herself of the error. She was far too sensitive to be a successful sinner. She suffered too surely and too sharply to make the game worth the candle.

Perhaps no bride has ever felt more aggrieved than did this girl as she walked about The Hurst grounds the day after that “coming home,” which is usually a bright era in a woman’s life. Had she been left uninterruptedly to herself, she would have beguiled the period of her husband’s absence by bright thoughts of his coming back—in making herself at home, and manifest in the house, as it were. But she was not left to herself. She was left to a couple of hard, honest, narrow-minded women, who were perfectly justified, from their rigorous point of view, in being unpleasant to her. All her hopes had been dashed in a sudden and unexpected way, that was in itself subversive of many of her best intentions. She could not carry her grievance to her husband, for reasons that have been given before, and she knew that none other than her husband could help her in this strait. Altogether, she felt very miserable, and very much

as if she were left to herself to perish, as she walked along under the trees through which the wind came moaning on that November morning,

To have come to this pass at her age. She could not help it; loving wife as she was now, or would have been had she been let, she had a feeling of having done so poorly with her life. To have brought her wonderful capacity for both pain and pleasure into such a commonplace market as this promised to be! To have put herself, with her capabilities, into a position where she would be liable to such very little things in the way of troubles and annoyances. She pictured herself growing middle-aged in this companionship which she knew would grow more and more loathsome to her daily. Middle-aged under the auspices of the grim woman with the three-cornered shawl! Old under the eyes of the sister who carried the keys of every room into which she (Charlie) desired to go, and who went by the name of Dinah! To be helpless before them; to have nothing beyond them; to have to trim her sails to the wind that suited them; to learn to tolerate the life they liked! She felt that she had wrapped up her talent in a napkin with a vengeance, as she thought

over these things, and knew them to be partly deserved, for had she not married solely and wholly for the sake of being free, unfettered, well-placed, and well-established ? The future of nothingness that had loomed before her in Robert Prescott's house had not been so dark a thing as this ; for this was clearly a judgment on the lightness with which she had suffered herself to be wooed and won without an atom of love on her part.

After a time she reached the entrance to a little grass-grown lane, guarded by a little wicket-gate. She turned into it, and walked on scarcely heeding where she was going, till she came to a wall that was built across the road and into the meadows on either side. Suddenly she remembered the right of way question between old Mr. Goring and old Mr. Fellowes, of which her husband had told her, and she knew that she must be on the border of the Goring Place estate.

The thought brought back very pleasant memories of the man who now owned it, of the man who had once on a time—ah ! how long ago it seemed now !—fired her ambition in that drawing-room at Roehampton, and since then had said a few frank friendly words to her in a soft tone on the pier at

Brighton. Their intercourse had been but a brief thing, but somehow or other it was very deeply graven on her mind. It had been but a brief slight thing, but she felt that it had been one of the sweetest, most graceful experiences of her life, and so she was grateful to the man who had given it to her. Is it a fact, that "women's hearts are made for minstrels' hands alone," and that they do lack half their tone when played by other fingers? Certain it is that we, none of us, think that lady ill-endowed to whom nature "gave sense, good humour, and a poet," and the latter does not rank as the lesser good.

Thinking of him, and thinking of him kindly, the forlorn young bride who was so left to herself was seized with a great desire to see a bit of Goring Place. For a few minutes she seriously thought of trying to scale the wall; but she gave up that idea quickly, for the wall was slippery with November damp. Then she leant against the partition that had been made in ill temper, and went into a day-dream, wherein she saw herself altered and aged, and still a mere nothing at The Hurst; and that yellow-haired girl whom she had met in the road near Portslade on the night of her own

engagement—the mistress of Walter Goring's home and heart. "And there will be no mother and sister to keep her out of either," she thought with a sore feeling; "and if there were, no mother or sister could choke the way to Walter Goring's heart." Then she pulled her hat a little lower over her eyes, and drew her shawl more closely around her, and set off back through the drift that was worse than rain, in that there was more want of purpose about it, to regain The Hurst, and, she hoped, have some luncheon.

Meanwhile Henry Fellowes had come in, well pleased with the way in which all things had gone during his absence, and anxious to communicate his good pleasure to his wife.

"Where's Charlie?" he asked, the instant he opened the door of the dining-room, where his mother still sat darning stockings in a way that was enough to make a man curse the loom in which they were made.

"Mrs. Henry is gone out most imprudently," the old lady replied, looking up at her son over her spectacles.

"Gone out walking?"

"Yes; I told her that you would be more pleased

to find her in with some work in her hands when you came back ; but Mrs. Henry does not like work, and does, I am *sorry* to see, like to have her own way."

"Well, mother, and why not? I can't have her walking about in this weather after that illness of hers, though," he continued, going to the window, and looking for his wife on the grass plot. "Why do you call her 'Mrs. Henry' always, mother?"

"It is difficult to know what to call her, Henry," his mother replied; "her head is like a boy's, and she has a boy's name, by which I *cannot* bring myself to address her. If you wish it, and she wishes it, I do not mind calling her Charlotte, which is what her godfathers and godmothers meant to be her name, if she ever had any."

Mrs. Fellowes had commenced her speech with much calm deliberation, but she wound it up with a degree of vicious haste and excitement that was bad for her needle. That implement broke—snapt off short—and Mrs. Fellowes sought for its fellow with tears in her eyes, and a trembling throughout her frame caused by righteous resentment.

"Don't call her Charlotte ; she doesn't like it,"

he said carelessly, as he walked towards the door. He was exceedingly unobservant of feminine tempers and tremblings and troubles. "I'll go and look for her. I have some news that will please her, I think; and, mother, see that luncheon is on the table by half-past one, will you?"

The old lady sighed assent.

"You wish to dine late then, Henry?"

"Yes; at six or half-past, I don't care." Then he went into the hall and found an old cap, and went out into the garden to search for his wife.

When he was gone his mother summoned the cook, and that functionary agreed with her to her heart's content as to the shamefulness of altering hours that had been held to be the only good and proper ones at which to feed in that house for more years than could be easily counted. "However, we'll dine at half-past six for the future, cook; and when I'm dead, perhaps Mr. Henry will remember that years ago Doctor Oldfield said, 'My dear lady, I won't answer for your life if you don't dine punctually at two o'clock constantly.' Those were his words, cook—not that I should wish Mr. Henry to think of them for a moment; of course I'm nothing."

"I've no patience with such ways," the sympathetic cook rejoined.

"Ah!" Mrs. Fellowes resumed, bitterly, "young people are very different now, very different indeed, to what they were fifty years ago; then we dined when it suited our fathers and mothers."

"Well, there, ma'am, don't take on; Mr. Henry will know better some day."

"I sincerely hope he never may know, cook. I'm only an old woman hastening to my grave. I don't want my son's conscience to be burdened with the thought that his folly made his mother's last days miserable. Yes; harricot beans and Jerusalem artichokes and celery will be vegetables enough, I think; but there, I can hardly think at all to-day."

"Ah, ma'am, master would find the difference if he hadn't you to think for him. The young lady seems, by what they tell me, to be very nice spoken and likely, but no more head than nothing for housekeeping, I should say."

In reply to which Mrs. Fellowes gave a fierce little "Ah!" and then a lachrymose groan, and then dropped a few tears in amongst the darning cotton. As she uttered no words, however, Cook

was obliged to feel herself dismissed ; but she had a pretty little tale to carry back to the kitchen.

In about five minutes from the moment of Henry Fellowes leaving the house he met his wife, and the way in which she sprang to meet him caused him straightway to forget any small annoyance his mother might have caused him. In fact, this loyal-hearted honest gentleman was just as much to blame as all the rest. Being gifted with a certain thickness of skin, he did regard things that were dagger-blows and spear-thrusts to another as mere pin-pricks. He was not readily annoyed, and he was very quick to forget annoyances. He could always walk out into the fresh air and forget any number of feminine frowns. He had been used to his mother being disagreeable, and his sister unsympathetic, for so many years, that he regarded their being so as quite in the order of nature. He did not heed them ; they were powerless to ruffle him, and he forgot how sorely his sensitive young wife must suffer through them.

“I am so glad to see you, Harry ; I have had such a wretched morning,” she cried ; and had he responded in any way the whole story, despite her resolutions, would have come out then. But he

did not respond ; he only tucked her hand into his arm, and replied—

“ Yes ; you shouldn’t have come out in the rain, my darling. I shall be having you laid up. I find everything has gone on capitally on the farm, Charlie. My bailiff is a brick.”

“ I wish you had taken me over the farm with you. I have been down to the end of a lane trying to peer over at Goring Place.”

“ By-the-way, I have some news for you, Charlie. I met Goring out riding, and he wants me to let a house—a very pretty cottage I have in the village—to a friend of his, a widow lady, who wishes to come and live here ; another neighbour for you.”

“ Mrs. Walsh ? ” Charlie cried, interrogatively.

“ Yes ; that’s the name. Do you know her ? ”

“ Slightly—yes ; it was at her house that I first met Walter Goring. She’s a widow, I know, now ; and so she wants to come and live here ? how very, very strange.”

CHAPTER II.

THE BRIDE AT HOME.

THE neighbourhood about Deneham was generally spoken of by its inhabitants as a remarkably lively and sociable one. It was not too thickly studded with county magnates. Walter Goring was the sole large landed proprietor—with the exception of Lord Harrocoats—in the vicinity; and Lord Harrocoats cannot be said to count, since he was rarely visible to the eyes of the profane in that part of the world. Society in those regions was composed chiefly of the families of men who had “places,” and farmed their own land, but who had no land beyond that which they kept in their own hands; and of gentlemen-farmers who rented so many acres that they were of more power, parochially and locally, than the men of small estates.

Henry Fellowes was one of the latter class. The Hurst was a mansion, and the land surrounding it was his own. But he farmed the whole of it himself, having no superfluous acres to let, and soar by these means into the dignity of a landed gentleman, with gentlemen-tenants under him. In fact, he was a yeoman—not a county magnate, and he was one of many about Deneham.

There was rather a clanish atmosphere about the neighbourhood. For the last two or three generations, it appeared as if every one within a radius of fifty miles of Deneham, had had large families with tender feelings towards each other. They had in truth so married and intermarried, that it behoved the stranger in the land to be very careful how he spoke well, or ill, or at all about one to the other. It was a neighbourhood that lunched, and dined, and took tea incessantly with, and was liable to raids from any other portion of itself at any moment, in fact. On the whole, a very social, charming neighbourhood. A trifle too much given to conversing about its own affairs with wild interest for the aforesaid stranger to feel at ease at all times—but very social and charming, and intimate nevertheless.

It accorded Mrs. Fellowes, the bride, a week to get into place before it came to call upon her. It was very impatient to see her, but it curbed its impatience, and took it out in calling frantically about upon itself, and reporting all that had oozed out respecting her. This was very little, but it was appetising. It disapproved of the way in which she had entrapped Mr. Fellowes, but would say nothing more about *that*, since he *had* married her; but it “must say, that it was a pity that she should wear her hair short—so masculine.” It forbore to add, that it was reputed becoming, and that a fever had forced her into the reprehended fashion.

When the week expired, she was “at home” in the square drawing-room, and the ceremony set in with severity. Old Mrs. Fellowes undertook the organisation of it, and assisted at it in a new three-cornered shawl. She insisted on her son’s staying in for long hours during several dreary days, to hear people congratulate and sip sherry, and eat cake at him.

The old lady grew gracious to her daughter-in-law during those days. Playing a prominent part in it herself, she tolerated Charlie as an essential portion of the pageant. She liked to hear her son’s

wife reminded by old family friends, that she (Charlie) possessed an inestimable blessing and privilege in having a mother-in-law and sister who would doubtless save her all housekeeping trouble and responsibility. They patronised the young wife in a semi-playful way, as a thing to be gradually ripened and improved, and rendered fit for Deneham and its environs. Mrs. Fellowes, senior, enjoyed this manner of theirs. She enjoyed their parting whispers also. Many of them kindly stated their belief, that "in time she will do very well—oh! very well indeed; you'll be here to correct any little folly you see; at present she does give herself airs; ah! it is hard, no doubt, when you think of how your son might have married." The last clause of the sentence was generally called forth by some few brief words from Mrs. Fellowes, to the effect that Charlie "hadn't a penny—and was as helpless as an infant." The statement that Charlie "gave herself airs," was simply a fiction, which grew out of the fact that she did not appear to be impressed with the airs of those who came to see her.

On one occasion she came to the front, and did battle valiantly for a woman whom she did not like.

Mr. Goring had come in and stayed for ten minutes, and during those ten minutes he had talked exclusively to Henry Fellowes and Charlie, and so had aggrieved the rest. As soon as he left, Mrs. Travers said sketchily, that "it could have been wished that things were different at Goring Place," and Charlie, on whom the rectoress was beaming for the first time, looked an eager "why and how," though she said nothing.

"Ah!" Mrs. Fellowes struck in, "it's in the blood; I always said so." She did not say what was in the blood, or what she had always said. But mystery invariably makes its mark. Mrs. Travers, a tall, thin lady, with a high sharp nose; only shook her head by way of replying to this, and assumed that air of sorrow for the sins of one's neighbours, which is one of the easiest, most agreeable, and effective forms of Christianity.

"What is in the blood?—talent?" Charlie asked.

Old Mrs. Fellowes shook her head. In all sincerity she did believe that talent and genius were only more uncommon forms of depravity and recklessness. Her chief ideas on the subject were gleaned from stray readings of the memoirs of

Byron, Beau Brummel, and others, who had distinguished themselves either in cantos or cravats. Therefore, when Charlie asked, if "it was talent in the blood?" she shook her head, and moralised in her heart on the decay of "dread of evil" in the modern day.

"It was a pity, a great pity," Mrs. Travers resumed, "that Mr. Goring should have kept open house and plunged into gaiety immediately after his uncle's death; it *does not* do for young people to disregard the world; *we* called, and I wanted Mr. Travers to speak to him; but there it is," turning to Mrs. Fellowes, senior, "Mr. Travers never will." Mrs. Travers stopped, shook her head, and looked sorry for Mr. Travers and the world in general.

"What did you want Mr. Travers to speak about?" Charlie asked, laughingly. She was not sufficiently impressed with these people and their power—she dared to look glad when they looked glum.

"It was enough to make one's hair stand on end, to hear of their goings on," old Mrs. Fellowes said, sharply.

"Oh! it was the worst taste," Mrs. Travers replied, with a bland delight in the badness of it

that was most refreshing to witness. "I was willing to countenance the girl, pitying her, poor thing! and feeling, that grossly as her parents have sinned, we are not called upon to judge; but—oh, no; she preferred the laxity of manners at Goring Place, and so kept away from me."

"Ah! it's in the blood," Mrs. Fellowes said, savagely.

"She's a pretty girl, that cousin of his," Henry Fellowes put in hurriedly, hoping to avert the storm of feminine invective against feminine evil-doing, which he saw was ready to break; "she was riding with Goring that night we met him, if you remember, Charlie?"

Did she not remember it? Aye, and every shade of the light, and every flicker of the leaves, under which they met! Some things get burnt into the memory, and, till the end comes, who can tell whether they are burnt in for a purpose or not.

"She's a very impertinent, under-bred girl," Mrs. Travers said, severely; "I assure you, the way she talked to Mr. Travers made his blood run cold—cold."

"Well, well," Henry Fellowes said, persuasively,

"we can't hold young Goring accountable for her, you know; he's done the best thing he can do about her, I think, sent her to live with a clergyman's widow, near Brighton; he couldn't help her being there when he came."

"But he might have helped having the extraordinary people he had down there, so indecorously soon after his uncle's death; it was outrageous, I assure you, Mr. Fellowes—positively outrageous."

"What did they do?" Charlie asked sharply. She saw her husband looking at her imploringly, but she had lost all desire to keep the peace.

"Oh! tearing all over the county—they were professionals, you know—all professionals; there was a man who painted, I believe, and another man who sang, and their wives and sisters; very respectable people in their way, but not the sort of people we are accustomed to receive."

"No; I should think not," Charlie replied. With a mind given, as hers was, to the glorification of intellect and cultivation, this sort of talk was absolutely painful to her. She ached as she sat and listened to it; she would far rather have been subjected for hours to the cruder observations of her cook. Mrs. Travers, however, mistook the

feeling which dictated Charlie's speech, and said in answer to it,—

“Mr. Goring may have been obliged to associate with such people while he was writing for his living—as I really understand he did!—but now that he occupies such a very different position, he ought not to make so much of his Walshes and Levingses; he might be friendly with them—but he should be careful how he brings them here.”

“He should indeed,” Charlie said, looking steadily at her guest, “for Mrs. Walsh is one of the most fastidious women in London.”

“A set of atheists—if that's what you call talent, and genius, and fastidiousness,” Mrs. Fellowes said sharply; “they never could go to church in the morning, any of them. Oh! no, it was too hot; but they could sit out on the lawn and read their trashy books, and drink their trashy claret from morning till night. I call it loose—*loose*, that's what I call it.”

“Well; we will *hope* the best,” Mrs. Travers said, energetically—so energetically, that all who heard her, immediately thought the very blackest things that were possible of the master of Goring Place and his late guests. Then she rose up, and

prepared to take her leave; and Henry Fellowes made her departure pleasant by saying to her,—

“We are all likely to know more of Mrs. Walsh—she is coming to be my tenant.”

“Your tenant! where?”

“Brook Green Cottage; she has taken it for three years!”

“She’s a person who will be no acquisition to the village,” Mrs. Travers said, severely; and Charlie answered, maliciously,—

“Oh! I hope she may be induced not to hold herself entirely aloof from us!”

“Aloof from us!—aloof from us, indeed!” Mrs. Travers retorted; but she would not trust herself to say more just then; and in the midst of her discomfiture there was this balm—namely, that the bride would be made to pay a severe penalty for her audacity as soon as she should be left alone in the bosom of her husband’s family.

Women can make one another miserable in such infinitesimally small ways, that a man can rarely be brought to comprehend how the business is managed. A sentence, uttered in all suavity, acts frequently like a blister on the ears feminine on which it falls, while the contemporaneous male

auditor thinks it merely foolish or friendly, as the case may be. Young Mrs. Fellowes had made a foe of the wife of her spiritual pastor and master by the way she uttered, what sounded to Henry Fellowes merely a natural, kind speech, expressive of a desire for future intercourse with Mrs. Walsh. He merely saw in it a further illustration of that insanity which prompts women to pant to see more of a sight which rarely gives them pleasure—each other, namely. Mrs. Travers saw in it an insult to herself. “Her manner of vindicating the goings on at Goring Place, was disgusting.” Mrs. Travers told her husband, when she got back to him, after her visit to the bride, “no religious principles evidently, and a very, very lax idea of what is due to the world. I suppose we must ask them to dinner? What day shall it be?”

“Well; we had better give them long notice—say Tuesday week; we must ask Goring to meet them.”

“Yes, of course; I hope nothing will prevent his coming,” Mrs. Travers replied, earnestly. Despite the irreligious tendencies she had discovered in these people, she was very anxious that they should meet, and be amused under her roof. In the

intervals between her dinner-parties, she was, as became a Christian, ready enough to consign the denizens of Goring Place and The Hurst to perdition ; but when she did invest fabulous sums in venison and melons, she was desirous, as became a good housewife, that the "best people" in the neighbourhood should refresh themselves at her table.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. FELLOWES, SENIOR, ON PROPRIETY.

WALTER GORING had only stayed a few minutes when he came to make the bridal call at The Hurst. He disliked being sat upon a chair in the society of old Mrs. Fellowes and her daughter, and expected to talk polite conversation all round. He had nothing to say to them, and they had nothing to say to him that he cared to hear, and their atmosphere was a depressing one to him. Henry Fellowes, too, was unlike himself at this period. No man can be expected to be at his best when all his friends are sipping wine and eating cake, that will assuredly disagree with them, towards his long life and conjugal happiness. Walter Goring felt himself to be guilty of a piece of society-sham on his first visit to The Hurst ; therefore he made the call as short as possible, and promised himself that

he would soon come again and see them under more natural and auspicious circumstances.

Accordingly, about ten days after his first call, he made another at The Hurst. He rode over about twelve o'clock, meaning to go in, in the orthodox country neighbour fashion, and have a talk with Fellowes and his wife, and stay to luncheon with them. He liked both Charlie and her husband; she interested him still, though she had in a measure disappointed him. He recognised the latent power, and liked it, though it might never come forward now; still, it was there, he knew, and he liked and sympathised with it. Above all, he liked her for that most human of all reasons—because he saw that she liked him.

His book was out, and he carried a copy of it over with him, in order to present it, according to the promise given on the Brighton pier to Mrs. Fellowes. As he rode along, he rather looked forward to a pleasant morning's gossip with her about the novel, and with her husband about the next "meet," and what was doing on their land, and various other subjects of mutual interest to them. It was disappointing, therefore, when he arrived, to be shown into the room where old

Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah were sitting with Charlie.

"I didn't bargain for this," he thought, when the first silence fell—as it was inevitable it should fall—almost immediately after his entrance. He had really nothing to say to Charlie that he could not, with the most perfect credit and propriety, have cried aloud in the market-place. But he could not say it glibly, and comfortably before these two women. Again, the feeling of being sat upon a chair, and expected to say right things respecting the weather and the world in general, came over him. His young hostess, too, was not at her ease—that was plainly visible to him. A good deal of her brightness was gone; a good deal of her quick appreciation of his brightness was gone. He had the feeling that it was horribly ill-bred to exclude the two elder ladies from the conversation, and horribly unpleasant, to say nothing of its being morally impossible, to include them in it. He was weighted with the conviction that they would not follow what he said, unless he added explanatory notes. In short, he was thoroughly bored and put out by their presence, by their silence, by their speaking—by everything about them.

He made one or two futile attempts to be as he had been before. Handing his volumes to Charlie, he began,

“I have kept my promise, you see. I have brought you ‘The Cost of a Cure.’ You really have a right to it, for I was stuck in the middle of the second volume, when I met you first, for want of a character to enact certain parts—you suggested one to me.”

“Did I, really?” Charlie replied, hastily, taking the books from his hand. As she did so, he saw her glance quickly at Mrs. Fellowes, who was looking at her with that sagacious look over the spectacles which is sufficient in itself to drive the one on whom it is brought to bear, into gibbering idiocy. His allusion recalled to Charlie’s mind the way in which she had girded at her fate on that night; the glance towards Mrs. Fellowes was dictated by another prick of conscience—it was dislike to facing that fate she knew, which had led her on to marry that lady’s son. This was the true interpretation of her shy, deprecating glance; but Mrs. Fellowes gave it another meaning. “So *they’ve* been talking some of the sickly twaddle that’s put in books, have they?” she thought; “and after it

she had the face to go and cajole my poor infatuated son!"

"Will you be a true critic, and tell me what you think of it—point out some of its faults to me when you have read it?" he asked, presently.

"I will try; but I'm not likely to fix upon any. I tell you honestly beforehand."

"Why not?—there are plenty."

"Probably; but I——" She stopped. The sagacious glance was being levelled at her again.

"The opinion of young ladies about a work that's worth anything is not of much value, I should imagine," Miss Dinah said, with severity. "For my own part, I do not pretend to be a judge. I do not approve of novels; and I have found that, if I did my duty, I have never had the time to waste in reading them."

Walter Goring was leaning forward, tracing the carpet pattern with the lash of his whip while Miss Dinah spoke. He just lifted his eyes to Charlie's when the speech was concluded, and smiled in a way that dispersed Charlie's quickly accumulating wrath. "I have no doubt that you are right," he replied gravely, with perfect politeness; then he went on, addressing Charlie alone:

"You have not given me your reason yet, Mrs. Fellowes—why will you not be able to fix upon my faults—the faults of this book, at least?"

"Because—I have not been tested, certainly, before—but I think I should lose judgment in the case of a person I liked." He looked rather flattered, and she added, quickly, "And I shall be sure to over-rate your novel, because you're the only novelist I know."

"And if that's the way she talks to them, I hope she may never know another!" was her mother-in-law's inward comment on Charlie's rash declaration.

"Then aid and improve me by criticising. Poor Walsh and his wife used to be invaluable to me in that way, as in many another. Were you not sorry to hear of his death?" he asked, heartily.

"Very sorry. My husband is gone to the village this morning, to see how the repairs are going on at Brook-green Cottage."

"Which didn't want repairing," old Mrs. Fellowes remarked.

"Do you know that he died that night I met you out riding near Brighton?" Walter asked, ignoring

Mrs. Fellowes' opinions as to the repairs of the Brook-green Cottage.

"I didn't know that it was that night; I knew that it was about that time. What a pretty girl your cousin is, Mr. Goring. When is she coming back to Goring Place?"

"I want to have a talk to you about her one day," he replied, meditatively. "I don't know when she will be at Goring Place—when I can get some matrons to honour my bachelor abode with their presence, I suppose. I shall try to get Mr. Fellowes and you to favour me with a visit soon, Mrs. Fellowes. I want you to see the place."

"I shall like to see it. I haven't——" she checked herself—she was going to add, "I haven't seen anything I like since I have been down here;" but she changed her sentence, and said, "I haven't asked you if you dine at the Rectory to-morrow?"

"Yes—do you?"

"Yes," she said. And then he rose up, and said he would go down and look for Mr. Fellowes at the Cottage, and was gone before he had said half he had to say to Charlie, or had heard half she had to say to him. Amongst other things she had much wished to ask him what was going to bring the

beautiful widow down to dull Deneham? but she never got a good opening for the question.

“Why, in the world, does she sit with the tribe?” he thought to himself as he rode away. “There’s an end to my calling at The Hurst, if I am always to be had in with those women, who neither talk nor look well. If she doesn’t take care, she will get even as they are; it’s telling on her already; she’s a shade less graceful, through constraint, than when I met her at poor Ralph’s.”

He found Mr. Fellowes down superintending the workmen at the Cottage; in other words, standing about, and being very much in their way. “My wife is coming down to-morrow morning, to select papers and to decide on the colouring for the walls,” Henry Fellowes explained, when Walter made some remark to the effect of how well the house would look when finished. “She has excellent taste, and she is taking a great interest in having it all as trim as possible for Mrs. Walsh.”

“That’s really very kind of her,” Walter replied. He was rather touched by the unobtrusive kindness and forethought so displayed by Mrs. Fellowes for his friend. She was doing all she could to make things pleasant, and she had refrained from vaunt-

ing her exertions before him. "That's really very kind of her," he repeated. "May I look in here to-morrow morning, and assist in the selection?"

On Mr. Fellowes saying "Certainly," with effusion, Walter made another request, "And then couldn't you and Mrs. Fellowes come on and lunch with me?"

"Yes, thank you; a capital arrangement; it will strengthen us for old Travers' party in the evening: we'll come with pleasure." And though nothing more was said, each man knew that the other was very glad that the impromptu nature of the invitation did away with the necessity for including old Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah in it.

"That audacious puppy has been here," were the first words Henry Fellowes heard from his mother, when he saw her alone.

"Which?"

"Why, that young man from Goring Place."

"Oh—ah! so he told me," he replied, carelessly.

"Did you know he was such a very *old* and *intimate* friend of your wife's, Henry?"

"No—is he?" the happy-hearted gentleman replied, jovially.

"So it appears; ah-a-a! better he'd stay at home

and employ himself usefully on his own land than come here talking his nonsense. He sat here this morning till Dinah and I were quite tired of hearing his folly—not but that he was much too great a man to talk to us.”

“Why, mother, he’s one of the best fellows we ever had down here,” Henry Fellowes remonstrated. He was getting tired—long-suffering as he was—of every man or woman whom he liked being ruthlessly pulled to pieces, and pronounced wanting in this way. Then he went upstairs, and found Charlie sitting in her own room, reading.

“My darling pet, why do you come up in the cold?” he asked, affectionately—so affectionately that she could not bear to wound him by telling him that it was because his mother and sister made the warm room intolerable to her. They had picked up the second and third volumes of the “Cost of a Cure,” and made little sounds expressive of shock, with their lips, before the author was well out of the house; and they had fervently requested her even if she “would persist in reading such things herself, to keep them under lock and key, as they held themselves not entirely free from all responsibility in the matter of the virtue and

morality of their servants." Altogether, they jarred her nerves, so she fled from them. But she would utter no complaint on the subject to the husband who was so good to her.

CHAPTER IV.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

"I WILL drive you down to the Cottage in the trap, Charlie," Mr. Fellowes said to his wife the following morning, before he left the dining-room after breakfast; "twelve o'clock will be time enough for you, eh?"

She told him, "Yes," she would be ready to go by twelve. Even this little break in the daily monotony of life at The Hurst was hailed rapturously by her. Since their return home her husband had been so absorbed in various business matters that he had never even so much as offered to take her for a drive. She was his first, his only thought when he was in the house; but when he was out of doors he almost forgot her. He fell back into his old habits of riding vigorously about from one end of his land to the other, and of actively superin-

tending whatever works might be in progress. He imagined that he had no time for mere pleasure drives and walks during the day, and the November evenings were not calculated to show the country off to advantage.

So he had suffered day after day to go by without ever thinking of taking her beyond The Hurst garden : that garden, which was not kept up sufficiently well to make it "a thing of beauty" and a "joy for ever."

Now, when she agreed to go out with him in the trap at twelve o'clock, he reminded himself of this habit he had of always being desperately busy as soon as he got upon his farm. "I may be detained a little ; but, I tell you what, Charlie, if I'm not in by twelve, have Moore drive you down to the Cottage, and I will either join you there, or meet you at Goring Place at half-past one."

"Very well," she replied ; but she felt disappointed. She would much rather that her tall, handsome husband had driven her through Deneham in his dashing trap, than that his groom should do so. The bloom was off the plum at once as he made the proviso.

"Are you going to Goring Place ? I heard

nothing of that?" Mrs. Fellowes senior asked of Charlie when they were alone.

"Yes. Mr. Goring has asked us there to luncheon this morning."

"Has he had the civility to include my daughter in the invitation?"

"He didn't send any message by me; if he has invited her he has written to her, I suppose," Charlie answered, with a smile at the improbability of Walter Goring bringing Dinah upon himself in any such way.

Mrs. Fellowes drew her little shawl more primly over her shoulders, and then drawing the work-stand, with the eternal stockings upon it, nearer to her, she said—

"If Henry does not join you at the Cottage, of course you will not think of going up to Goring Place alone?"

"Why, Mrs. Fellowes? You heard my husband tell me to go." Charlie was desperately indignant at the suggestion, and desperately afraid that she might be driven to act upon it, and so be deprived of this hour or two in Walter Goring's house to which she had looked forward.

"Of course he takes it for granted that his sister

will accompany you," Mrs. Fellowes said, coldly; "no one but you would have thought, for an instant, of going up there alone—setting the world at defiance; Dinah will go with you."

Charlie almost groaned. Not only was the bloom brushed off, but all sweetness was extracted from the plum by this unlooked-for arrangement. It made her very sick at heart as she contrasted what this episode in her existence would be now, with what it might have been.

It is not too much to say that Charlie cordially hated Miss Dinah when even the half-past twelve bell rang and her husband did not appear, but in his place there came his angular sister. She cordially hated Miss Dinah, and she did hope, heartily, that Miss Dinah would drink of the waters of bitterness, and be much bored. Her sister-in-law's appearance was an outrage to her in every way. Miss Fellowes was one of those women who array themselves in garments of price on state occasions only, and then look rather more awkward and out of place than they do in their ordinary habiliments. She was a woman who would have her dresses made what she called a "nice walking length," short enough in fact to offer a free view of feet and ankles

that were not pretty. Her skirts and her whole drapery had a square effect, there was not a curve or a graceful line about her. Charlie hated her as she clambered up, wrong foot foremost, to the back of the trap, and felt that the harmony would be marred by the presence of this duenna whom she was taking.

They found Walter Goring at the Cottage, and there was comfort to Charlie in the way his face fell when he saw Miss Dinah. "What did you bring her for, Mrs. Fellowes?" he asked, dolefully; for Miss Dinah commenced leaping about among the repairs and repairers at once, in a way that left her companions unfettered.

"What did I bring her for?" Charlie answered, hastily. "Don't pretend to think that I brought her; my husband couldn't join me here, but he is going to meet us at your place—that arrangement didn't please them, however; so, as soon as Harry was gone out, they altered it, and Miss Fellowes took possession of me." She laughed, as she spoke, but in a way that showed him she was very nearly crying.

"What an impertinence to your husband, and what a bore for us all," he said, quietly. "Of

course I should be delighted to receive Miss Fellowes whenever she deigned to honour me with her presence, but just to-day she is superfluous. I had so much to say to you that I can't say under her auspices."

"I felt stultified by them yesterday, and so did you," Charlie replied, quickly.

"Why do you receive your guests in full family conclave in that way, then?"

"Oh! I can't help myself; if I gave orders that every one who asked for me should be shown into the drawing-room, Mrs. and Miss Fellowes would march in with me, or before me, and sit and look stiff, and do nothing."

"What a strange girl you are—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Fellowes, really, but it was only the other day that I knew you as Miss St. John, you see!"

"In what way am I strange? Quick! here she comes."

"Why, you are affecting now to think that you will bear this mute inglorious slavery for so long as they may please to make it last. You won't, you know! You can't, in fact, if you're ever going to do anything."

"What should I do, now—there's nothing——"

"I have heard all that before," he interrupted, laughing. "You're going to tell me that you 'lack incentive' again; now I will give you one—it will give you an unassailable position in your home."

"Whenever my husband is out of the house I feel so powerless," she said, in a low tone. Then she remembered that this man was nearly a stranger to her, for all that sympathy which existed between them, and once more her conscience goaded her for having been led on to make so much of a confidence as she had made to him, and she crimsoned, and lowered her head a little.

"I understand you so well, Mrs. Fellowes," he said, softly. "I don't think that you are one to be ever bored by your own society; but you will get very weary and worn out if it's compulsory upon you to be constantly in the society of others. Enshrine yourself in the library at The Hurst, and have it understood from the first that it is your sanctuary; then you will be free to read, and think, and write during those hours of your husband's absence which now hang so heavily. Forgive me for speaking in this way to you; forget that I have not known you long—and remember only that we know each other well."

She looked up at him gratefully. (All this time these two had been standing in the cottage garden, they had suffered Miss Dinah's impatience to see the full extent of her brother's extravagance in the matter of repairing this house to carry her away from them.) Charlie looked up at her companion gratefully, and her face seemed brighter and younger than it had been a few minutes before.

"If I do that, will you sometimes come and see me, and help me?" she asked.

"I will come as often as you will admit me."

"Because if I haven't some one to urge me on and encourage me, I shall break down."

"Well, we will encourage each other to work; is this to be a compact?"

He took her hand as he asked it, and she, not answering, but looking away restlessly into the distance, suffered it to remain in his clasp. She was thinking that probably her husband would not care one atom whether she worked or was idle, failed or succeeded. Her ambition—the ambition to do something with the power she had—would make no appeal to him. She knew this, and the knowledge was dispiriting. Nevertheless, the old yearning to do and be a something more than she

was, to make for herself a motive for living, to have an interest beyond those domestic ones, which were insufficient to fill her nature, ran along her veins like fire. As she stood there thinking thus, still with her hand in his, Miss Dinah came out, and bore down upon them.

“You’re a long time taking leave of Mr. Goring, Mrs. Henry; you commenced shaking hands with him when I was at that bedroom window.”

“Did I?” Charlie replied, with the utmost composure. “Yes, Mr. Goring, this *is* to be a compact.” Then she withdrew her hand after giving him the promissory clasp, and they went in to choose the papers.

“Of all the bare-faced flirtations I ever saw, this is the worst!” Miss Dinah said to herself as she followed them closely; “their hand-shaking, and their compacts, and their goings-on altogether; I’ve no patience with it!”

Deneham did not distinguish itself as far as the papers were concerned. They were flaring, large-patterned, coarse in colour. Mrs. Fellowes found them all wanting, and made out a list of others to be sent for. She revelled in being able to exercise her taste, more especially as she was

powerless to do it in her own home. "I want Mrs. Walsh to find that I haven't forgotten some of her likes and dislikes," Charlie said animatedly to Walter; "let us order one sitting-room to be hung with white-watered paper, with the tiniest of gilt mouldings, and that bit of a room with pale green—pictures hang so well on it."

"Do you like Mrs. Walsh?" he asked.

"I am not quite sure that I do. I don't think she likes me, does she?"

"You will probably get very intimate when she comes down here," he replied, evasively.

She shook her head. "What brings her here?" she asked, and then she saw that Walter Goring looked rather embarrassed.

"Oh! couldn't keep up the Roehampton House, and—and—liked this neighbourhood when she was staying down here with me. Very likely she won't stay here long: I fancy she will travel."

"What a glorious beauty she is!" Charlie cried, irrelevantly; "if I were a man, how I should adore her."

"You see men are wiser," he replied.

"I don't know, I can't judge. I have seen so few with her."

"You have seen me with her, for instance."

"At a party, where your adoration would have been compromising," she said, laughing.

"That would have been her look out. I certainly should have expressed the adoration if I had felt it; it would have been altogether her affair whether she accepted it or not." He forgot, as he spoke, that he had been in the habit of calling her "his goddess;" honestly he only thought of her as a dear old friend. There was a very warm feeling in his heart for each one of these three women whom Fate had thrown in his way, and made congenial in some respect to him. But he was not in love with either of them yet; and the one who had the most in her, the one who possessed the subtlest charm for him, though he scarcely knew it yet, was a wife—the wife of a man who left her to find out that a new name and a ring on the third finger are not sufficiently absorbing and interesting things in themselves to keep the thoughts at home. "Fellowes is a thoroughly good fellow," Walter Goring thought, as he watched the brilliant, but far from beautiful, face of Fellowes' wife; "but I wish that girl hadn't married him; there's too much fire in that face for a man who is not its master not to be its

slave. How the Daisy and she will hate each other! Apparently they resemble one another in one or two things, but in reality it is in those very things that they most differ, I imagine." Then she lifted her eyes and found that he was watching her, and she turned away impatiently, when she saw that Miss Dinah observed it too. "I don't like to tell him not to stare at me," she thought, "or he will think that I think a great deal more than I do about it; but I'm sure that Dinah's thoughts on the subject are not the purest that might be recorded." She was right in this: Dinah's thoughts on the subject interfered with her balance, and nearly caused her to tumble off the back of the trap as they drove over to Goring Place, where they found luncheon and Henry Fellowes awaiting them.

Henry Fellowes' undisguised astonishment, and his admirably disguised pleasure at seeing his sister, did not restore that lady to equanimity. "I have come unasked," she said to him in a low tone; "I know that very well, and not wanted either; but I could *not* let your wife come here alone, Henry."

"All right, all right, Dinah; your coming makes it all the better: the more the merrier, you know."

"No, Henry; I am aware that I shall not add to

the merriment; merriment and I parted company a long time ago, *as* I think you might remember; but your wife is frivolous and young, and I feel it to be my duty to keep her right while I can, even if she does regard me as a restraint and an encumbrance."

Henry Fellowes laughed, and then proceeded to look penitent for having done so. He, too, had intended being very happy at Goring Place this day, and his sister's presence interfered with his scheme. He could bear them at home, this mother and sister of his, but he really could hardly bear them away from home. They were as part of The Hurst to him; it never occurred to him to think that The Hurst would be a much more agreeable residence without them. He was used to them, and accepted them as "facts" (almost after the manner of a woman) while they remained in their own sphere. But even he recognised the existence of something beyond and above them as soon as they drifted out of it. Henry Fellowes felt strongly this morning at Goring Place that his sister was a "restraint and an encumbrance," and that they would have got on ever so much better without her. He was sorry to feel this about his own, for he was

a man who had correct notions, and believed in natural affection to the very verge of belief—but he did feel it, and he saw that Charlie felt it too. Miss Dinah had been over-zealous in the good cause of keeping watch and ward over her brother's wife; she was liable to be checkmated at any moment from the time he perceived that his cherished, trusted, loved, young wife felt her to be what she had called herself, “a restraint and an encumbrance.” He told himself angrily that Dinah had had no right to come for the avowed purpose of mounting guard over his wife; the doing so was an offence to him and to Charlie—especially to him. It was calling in question his capability for looking after his own honour, it was a slur on his judgment of the woman whom he had thought fit to entrust with that and his name; it was casting a doubt on his having inspired the girl he loved with a guarding warm love for him in return! It was everything that was most offensive and irritating to a man, in fact, and Henry Fellowes felt offended and irritated about it. “What if Charlie had known and liked Walter Goring before she married him?” he asked himself, as he sat at Walter Goring's table that morning; “it had been but a

girlish preference; or if it had been more, it was now as though it had never been to his honest-hearted Charlie."

He longed to show them both how trustful and magnanimous he was. Almost unconsciously to himself the seeds of doubt were sown in his breast, but he would not let them grow. Of "doubt," did I say? Scarcely that. He would not doubt or fear, or regret, the "something" that he still could not prevent himself from feeling might have been between them. "I'd trust her with him or any other man through the world while she *seemed* to love me," he thought, with a swelling heart. "The poor pet! perhaps it was want of money that came between them; but she had got over it before she took me." He little knew that her heart had never given one throb for Walter Goring—that she had never had a feeling to "get over" concerning him—that he was, or had been, to her only the author of certain pages which had strung her up and given her new ideas—that he was, in fact, but a little lower than the angels and Dickens and Bulwer to her. Hero-worship (more especially if the worshipper and worshipped be not both well-stricken in years) is apt to mislead beholders: some of its salient

points bear a strong resemblance to love. There is the same blind belief and wild anxiety, and tenderness to the shortcomings of the object—the same pleasure in the mere fact of its presence—the same jealousy of the grand creature coming off its pedestal for another—the same humble, foolish, futile, identification of oneself with its triumphs and failures, its hopes and despairs and aspirations and defeats. Above all, there is the same sufficiency, for the time it lasts, about it. Nothing else is sought, nothing else is needed. The true devotee kneels with his back to the world, and sees and cares for—only the shrine.

As a rule, the hero-worshipper who would keep the faith should flee from the possibility of personal intercourse with the man or woman he has come to love in type. The æsthetic poet comes before you in the flesh a rubicund, rotund, flabby man, loose in attire, looser in address, and all his music is mute in your soul when you see him, and you marvel how honest nature can be guilty of such gross mistakes—such fearful misfittings of matter to mind.

Or, in the course of the march of life, you come suddenly upon one of your favourite novelists, and find that all his wit and all his good manners and

geniality are reserved for his writings. Or you find her who pours out pathos by the page—pathos so terribly true that you are plunged into low spirits for a week after reading it—you find her a brawny, badly-dressed, badly-bred woman, void of all those tender tricks, those furtive fascinations, with which she endows her heroines. The man who has made refinement a religion to you, strikes at the foundation of that religion by showing how coarse he, its high priest, can be. The lady whose language almost leaps, it has such spirit, rush, and freshness about it, is of the earth, earthy—broadly material, in a way that makes you wish, with Sydney Smith, that you had the power of “reading the riot-act and dispersing her.” Heavy in step, heavy in style, the memory of her comes upon you as a nightmare ever after as you read her stories, and you sigh for your hours of belief in, and hero-worship for, the unseen. But when the real comes up to the ideal, then it is all up with the possibility of proving a renegade to a faith at once so soothing and exciting. A religion more of the soul than the heart, and more of the head than either, its trammels are not to be thrown off lightly, and the vacuum that is felt, should the emptiness of it be proved, may not easily be filled

up. Was I right in saying just now, that some of the salient points of hero-worship bore so strong a resemblance to love as to be liable to mislead beholders?

They went over the house after luncheon, and then into the study, and despite Miss Dinah's square presence, it was a very pleasant time. Charlie lounging along through the corridor on her husband's arm, had felt equal to the nervous task of telling him that she wanted to have the library at The Hurst to herself, that she was going to write.

"Yes dear," he had replied, with prompt acquiescence. "What do you want to write about?"

This had been staggering, not to say crushing "I hardly know yet," Charlie had replied; "but I really wish to try, Harry. I have heaps of stories in my head, if I can only find the language to tell them in." Then they had gone on to Walter Goring's study, the walls of which were lined with books. The bindings gave all the tone and colour to the room, and it was not lacking.

"I believe that even I could write here," Charlie said, in a discontented tone, going up to his writing-table. "Why, you can't look to the right or left without having a thousand ideas put into your head,

and having had a classical education, it would be a shame if you couldn't express them. There's a view!" and she pointed to the window. "What a lot that view ought to do for you, Mr. Goring! You can plant your hero and heroine in half-a-dozen capital scenes in that one view."

"You have the same from the other end. Look, there is The Hurst," he replied.

"It would never look the same to me from The Hurst," she said, almost angrily.

"Then come here and work," he said laughing. "Fellowes, what do you say to coming here and staying until Mrs. Fellowes has exhausted the view. Seriously though, my library is at your service. You will find many books of reference here that may be useful to you."

"Thank you." This was uttered gratefully and gladly. Then her face fell and her eyes clouded over as she added, "What is the use of it, though, to me; I don't know enough about any one thing to refer about it to anything else." She went over and took a book from the shelf as she spoke, and seated herself in a low chair by the fire.

"If you are going to talk literature, Dinah and I will go and look at the gardens," Henry Fellowes

said, cheerfully. The opportunity for showing Dinah what "he thought about it" had come, and he seized upon it with avidity. His sister was obliged to follow him since no one asked her to stay where she was; but she followed, reviling his blindness in her heart. Not that even she doubted the perfect integrity of her brother's wife and her brother's friend, but it was antagonistic to all her notions that a penniless woman should come into a family and enjoy herself in any but a severe, sober way. As soon as Miss Dinah's shadow vanished, the two whom she had left behind breathed more freely. Then Charlie, still holding the book in her hand, looked up and said, half laughing and half sadly:

"I told my husband of my vague intentions just now, and he sent me down again by asking me 'what I was going to write about?'"

"I was on the point of asking you the very same question, Mrs. Fellowes."

"Well, I will tell you what I told him—I have heaps of stories in my head."

"Then think one out, and write it out, and let me be your first reviewer. I won't be so kind as you were to me yesterday. I will not promise not to see

any faults in what you do. You'll take my criticism as kindly as it will be offered, won't you?"

"Yes, that shall be in the compact too," she replied; and then he came over and looked at the book she was holding.

"Ah, read that," he said, handing it back to her; "and then read it again, and then read its brethren till you know them all by heart, if you can. I got my little wayward cousin to wade half through this essay of Addison's. By the way, she was the last young lady who was in this study."

"She read with you, I suppose?"

"I tried to make her read with me."

"How nice for her."

"She thought it quite the reverse of nice, I assure you, Mrs. Fellowes. She has first-rate musical ability, but very little mental power I imagine; that is to say, she is bright and sharp and quick-witted, but she is incapable of continued or earnest thought. I shall send over a batch of those "Spectators" and "Tatlers" for you, and come over and see what is wanting in The Hurst library. You'll allow me to lend you books?"

• "Oh! Mr. Goring, it will be so good of you. Send me a lot of poetry."

“I will send you Keats and Shelley, and so gradually lead you back, or rather forward, to Chaucer and Spenser.”

“I don’t think I shall care for their ‘quaint conceits;’ let me have that big Byron up there, and——”

“Scott’s rhymes, I suppose. No, no; all they have said is well enough, in their verse; but you would be sure to be struck by the magnitude and prodigious originality of their ideas, and to fancy they would stand reproducing in prose. No, no; don’t read such poetry as theirs, Mrs. Fellowes. Do you know anything of Keats, the man ‘who was cradled into poetry by wrong—who learnt in suffering what he taught in song?’”

He took down a small volume, as he asked it, and commenced turning over the leaves, with the touch of one who knew and loved them well.

“All I know of Keats is Shelley’s ‘Adonais.’”

“And Shelley’s ‘Adonais’ did not make you seek to know more of Keats? Well, I wonder at that. Before you read his poems, though, you must know a little about him. Shall I tell you? Do I bore you?”

She looked up at him, and smiled ; and — he knew that he was not boring her.

Nevertheless, it is possible that his sketch, brief as he made it, of that psychological wonder—the young surgeon-poet — might bore the reader. Therefore, it shall only be said here, that he did tell her of Keats' dismal life, and desperate love for the woman who "had the beauty of a leopardess;"—the woman who "kept him awake one night as a tune of Mozart's might do;"—the woman whose "name was ever on his lip, but never on his tongue;"—and for whom, in short, his life ebbed itself away in mere passionate feeling. He talked to her till her cheeks flushed with pity for the young genius who died so soon, and so sadly ; and who, humbled by his bitter conflict with destiny, asked only that the words—"Here lies one whose name was writ in water," should be placed over his grave. He read her a few lines—the few last plaintive lines of "The Pot of Basil," and some portions of that "Stretched Metre of an Antique Song," which is inscribed to his hapless parallel, Chatterton — the god-gifted boy, who was even more tired of life than Keats himself. And when he had finished, she heaved a sigh that was

neither one of pleasure nor of pain, but that was rather one of intense satisfaction at hearing things that were so delicately attuned to her own sympathies, spoken of in a manner that was the same.

“ He was a poet, and a lover too. Ah ! Mr. Goring, I feel now that it is sheer reckless presumption which made me think for a while that I could ever hope to do more than appreciate from below.”

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE CLOUD.

WALTER GORING'S visitors stayed with him until it was time to go home and dress for the Travers' dinner-party. The walk in the gardens which Mr. Fellowes had proposed to his sister had not been a very long one, for Miss Fellowes proved a morose and dreary companion on the occasion; therefore her brother suffered himself to stray back into the library sooner than he otherwise would have done. Then they looked through some volumes of rare old line engravings; and Walter inoculated Mrs. Fellowes with some crude bibliomaniacal notions respecting quaint and curious bindings; and the two gentlemen effected some new combinations of the lighter moveable furniture, under Charlie's auspices. Altogether, the three chief *dramatis personæ* were very happy, and Miss Dinah thought

it all as imbecile a wasting of time as she had ever heard of, much less witnessed. At last somebody found out that it was past five o'clock; and then they hurried away to the melody of Miss Dinah's declaration, that they had no time to lose, for the Traverses dined at seven, and were punctuality itself.

As they were driving home, Charlie mooted that plan which Walter Goring had proposed about The Hurst library, to her husband.

"I want it to be held sacred," she said; "no one must come in without knocking; perfect peace is essential while one is in the agonies of composition, Mr. Goring says."

"May I not come in?"

"O yes, you Harry; but no one else. Do take me there to-morrow morning, and instal me."

"Are you speaking of the library?" Miss Fel-
lowes croaked from behind.

"Yes," Charlie replied, looking affably over her shoulder at her sister-in-law. She was much more tolerant to Miss Dinah's presence than she had been while going to Goring Place; for the day had not been spoilt.

"My mother has never liked to have that room

used in common since my poor dear father died ; *you* know that, Henry ? ”

Charlie's head came round swiftly. Her husband stole an imploring look at her face ; he could only see her profile, but she was biting her underlip.

“ My mother won't mind your using the room, darling ! ” he whispered.

But his wife did not respond. She was bitterly offended at the perpetual placing of small stumbling-blocks in her path ; and bitterly wounded that her husband did not sweep them away with a strong hand at once—as would become a man. So she made no response to his conciliatory whispers ; and looked neither to the right nor left until they drew up at the door of The Hurst. Then she jumped down from the trap before he could get round to assist her, and ran up at once to her own bed-room, declaring to herself that she could “ not bear it any longer.” “ He sees me snubbed, and treated as a nobody,” she thought angrily ; “ his love for me is of the lowest—the very lowest—kind ; he has no pride for me,—no consideration for me,—his mother, and his sisters, and their senseless prejudices and fancies, are more to him than his wife.”

Her feelings rushed like a torrent from one extreme to the other. Up to the present juncture she had kept down all doubt of his devotion to her in fact, however tamely he suffered small disagreeables to assail her in seeming. But now she forgot all those manifestations of affection of his, by the thought of which she had heretofore strengthened herself to bear and forbear; she forgot all these, and declared to herself that his love was not such a love as a woman may glory and trust in.

He, meanwhile, was going to work his own way to make things smooth for them all. It was not a determined, masterly way; but it was manly enough after all, and very kind. He went in and sat down by his mother's chair, and began giving her little details of the day, till she relaxed a little from the austerity she had assumed, immediately she heard of their arrival. "I think your wife might have had the civility to come in and speak to me after having been away all these hours; I did expect *that* certainly, otherwise I should have sent these letters that have come for her up to her bedroom."

"She hasn't much time to dress, you know? I'll take the letters; where are they? oh! here. She will come and show herself to you in her finery

presently, mother," he continued, bending over the old lady and kissing her. Then he added, "I want the library well aired and put in order, mother dear; will you give orders about it to-morrow?"

"It is always in good order, Henry," she said, gravely.

"Too damp to sit in, isn't it?"

"What do you want to sit in it for?"

"Well, mother dear, this for one reason. You have not been accustomed to have young people with you constantly, and I think it would be pleasanter if my wife and you were not always together, perhaps; the library shall be *our* room, and then when we come either here, or to the drawing-room in the evening, it will be a change for her, and you will be glad to see her; it must be so tiresome to women to be together all day. Will you give orders about it to-morrow, mother dear?"

"Yes," she replied at once; and she said no word regarding her disinclination to seeing the hallowed spot invaded. Then he took his wife's correspondence, and walked up to her room.

She was sitting down already dressed, and still feeling and looking wrathful. When he came in, looking smiling and light-hearted, fuel was cast on

the fire of her indignation at the indifference and injustice that was displayed towards her, and she turned her head away and gave him no glance of welcome.

"What! ready, my darling! Now you look charming. I have promised my mother that you will go down and show yourself in your finery to her; here are a lot of letters for you."

She took the letters from his hand, with a cold "Thank you."

"What is it, Charlie?" he asked fondly, putting his hand on the back of her chair and leaning over her. She moved her shoulder away from him. His tenderness was repugnant to her at the moment. She told herself that it never caused him to stave off any annoyance from her.

"There's nothing the matter. Let me get up, please; I want to read my letters."

He stood upright, and let her get up and pass him. Then he followed her, and put his arm round her waist, and she wriggled herself free from him.

"Charlie! you're not angry still about what Dinah said?"

"Angry; no, not a bit."

"I have been talking to my mother, and she's

going to have the library put all right to-morrow morning; and you'll let me come in and smoke my cigar there in the morning, won't you, dear."

"Let! as if I had a word to say about anything in this house. You had better go and dress, Harry, if we are going to this dinner-party."

He obeyed her, and walked rather sadly away to his own dressing-room, thinking what a pity it was that all women were so touchy. "I suppose she wanted me to make a row about it," he thought; "women never will see that it's just as well to take things quietly."

Presently, before he was quite ready, he heard the bedroom door open, and a rushing as of silk draperies towards his door. Then there was a knock, and Charlie, looking flushed and tearful, burst into the room with an open letter in her hand. "My brother—Frank," she began, and then she stopped, panting with anger and sorrow; and when he asked, eagerly, "What is it, my darling?" she buried her face in her hands, and sobbed out—

"Dismissed the service—for—*nothing*."

It was useless entreating her not to cry, or attempting to get a coherent statement from her.

The news was contained in a windy effusion from

Ellen, to whose husband it had been communicated in what Ellen characterised as "a shamefully thoughtless letter," from Frank himself. His delinquencies were not of a very black dye. He had gone on shore in opposition to his captain's orders, and he had remained on shore, making sketches of scenery that pleased him much, long enough for the whole of his boat's crew to get intoxicated, and for one to desert. This was the head and front of his offending, but it had been sufficient to procure his dismissal and consequent disgrace. Mr. Prescott was evidently very hard upon him. "His sketches were intended for a work he has been writing," Ellen added. "'Serving off some place or other,' he calls it; and he had the coolness to say he would come and stay with us till he can get it published. Robert won't see him." ("Ask him here," Henry Fellowes interrupted, when Charlie read that portion of her sister's letter to him; "I want to know your brother, Charlie, and this will be a good opportunity; ask him here, of course, dear.") Then Charlie brightened up and beamed again, and hung about her husband's neck, reproaching herself in very hard terms for "having been cold to him just now," according to

her nature. But though she brightened up, and though she went down and displayed herself with much amiability to her mother-in-law, her heart was heavy about this blight that had come upon her brother. She had been imbued in her childhood with many of the traditions of the navy; she had been taught to regard it with a mixture of awe and affection—as a great institution; the men of her family had been steeped in salt water, so to say, for three generations. Altogether, though she brightened up at the prospect of seeing her brother immediately—of welcoming him to her husband's house, and though she was affable to old Mrs. Fellowes, and sufficiently agreeable at the Traverses to enlist the rector under her banner at once and for ever—though all these things were—her heart was filled with sad retrospective memories.

She had not seen her brother Frank for years—never since she had been grown up; but she remembered him as such a gallant-looking boy.

She recalled his first going to sea. It was fifteen or sixteen years ago, and yet how vividly she remembered the scene. It was a fair July morning, and the sun was shining with a brilliancy which she had never seen equalled since. There was flash from a

sword, and dazzle from much gold lace ; and a cerulean blue over all things, reflected this last from the new naval uniform of the boy who was going away that day to join his ship at Sheerness—going away in the first flush of his pride at being a cadet in Her Majesty's service—going away under the escort of his father, a veteran who had drawn his sword (the same sword whose flashing had been so glorious a thing in her eyes) in twenty causes, and gained nought save evanescent glory and lasting wounds in any of them.

It came back to her vividly as she sat and ate Mr. Travers' venison — that scene and hour in which pride and pain were so strangely mingled. The tears and prayers and cautions of the mother, who was seeing her eldest—the boy of boys—the flower of the flock, depart that day into the world of temptations and dangers, never again to be a home-bird—never again to kneel at her feet and pour out his prayers and tell his boyish sins and sorrows—never again to be entirely her own, in fact, from this moment of his first flight from the home of which he had been the star.

What a hero the handsome bold-faced boy was that day ! How his little sister worshipped him ; at

first from afar, but gradually as she grew accustomed to the bright dirk and blue jacket from the summit of his knee, whither she had climbed to pat his cheek with admiring love, and touch his dirk with tremulous pride! What a hero he was! Not that he had done anything yet beyond looking defiant and frank and fearless; but these qualities were no bad foundation on which to build up a fair fabric of bright hopes and expectations respecting his future career! How her father had alternated between nervous cautions, as to the demeanour it would behove the boy to observe, and exultant prognostications of the success, the early promotion, that assuredly awaited him, provided only that he did his duty, and never forgot the respect due to others, and himself! How the servants ran about deliriously, wiping their eyes with their aprons, and murmuring to each other, "Don't Master Frank look beautiful—quite the man?" How the dogs leapt about their old playfellow, regardless of his newly donned splendour, chorusing each other's entreaties that he would take them once more to a certain stack where rats did dwell! How fast the last hour slipped away! How well she remembered all these things, will be realised by any one who has

witnessed the first start in life of a boy who is held dear!

Her thoughts travelled on. The home scene was over, and the mother was left to pray away her bitter sense of barrenness, if she could—to bear it if she must. But then had come the triumphal progress through the village! There were eight or nine old men-of-war's-men, belonging to the coast-guard station, and these came to wish him God-speed and good-bye, and to hope, as they gripped his delicate young hand, that he would be “as fine an officer as his father.” Rough old sailors, some of them, but they had tears in their eyes as the boy whom they had carried on their shoulders many a time, and taught to detect a sail in the offing, and the difference of rig between a schooner and a barque, went out to face the dangers of that ocean which they had lauded to him.

Then there had been friends and neighbours standing about at window and gate to see the last of him. Kisses on the brow from matrons whose sons had been his schoolfellows—gentle reminders from pretty little girls, his sisters' allies, as to monkey-skins and elephants' tusks which he had promised to bring them home. Hearty hand-

shakings from the men who recognised his recently-established claim to manhood by refraining from patting him on the head. And then it was all over, and he was driven away to the railway station; and out of his mind nearly with elation at hearing himself included in a porter's obsequious mention of "two naval officers."

What gala-days those were on which his letters used to arrive! How eagerly they were read—how religiously they were listened to—how liberally lavished upon all inquiring friends! He was the grand topic for at least a week in the neighbourhood, after the receipt of one of those transparent effusions which always commenced—"My Dear Parents," and wound up with a gratuitous assurance of his naval instructor's complete satisfaction with the progress he was making in navigation and the art of seamanship. The fact of a letter having been received from Master Frank had a habit of spreading like wildfire. The dawning of the days on which they were due always saw his mother's cheek very pale, and his father's manner very restless. They knew the trials and temptations to which young blood is subjected, and they dreaded "the boy forgetting to write." But for years the gala-days

came very regularly ; Charlie remembered the dread was unfulfilled in the life-time of either parent.

Then again she remembered a date when their section of the world had reeled, and caressed its own judgment in having thought very high things of him. Frank's name was on the "list;" he was mated; he had been given the command of a slaver, and had quelled something small in mutinies, and been reported to "the Board" as "a highly deserving young officer." When the glorious news came home it made such a heaven there, that surely it was placed to his account and remembered, though dark days had fallen on him now !

How they had all delighted in him, and rejoiced in opportunities of talking about him ! He had shown himself to be the two best things a man can be—gallant and determined ; and, in addition to these, he was so successful ! The bright young fellow was positively adored in the home circle ! Fortune seemed to smile upon him ! The glow of pride had not cooled upon the cheeks of those who loved him, after the receipt of the first good news, when other and even better tidings were heard. At the risk of his own he had saved a brother officer's

life by jumping overboard—he had led on a boat attack on a slaver—he was mentioned specially in the captain's report, and he was to have his lieutenancy.

What pæans of pride they sang when that news reached them! Early success is always so much more glorious a thing than that which is long waited for and hardly won. He, the young lieutenant of nineteen, was very successful—was a star, in fact—and he was prized accordingly. He had been in the first flush of this fame when their father died, and since that time they had known little of each other. To Charlie, especially, he lived only as the bright-faced bold lad, who had left them in blue-and-gold one July morning; for she had been down in the fever when he came home to show himself last. It was very, very hard for her to think of him as under a cloud now, as these reminiscences flooded her mind. She felt that she should be shy and abashed before him if he did accept her husband's invitation and come to The Hurst, depressed and as one who came on sufferance. There is something horribly crushing to a woman in the thought that the head of a man who is dear to her may be down at ever so slight an angle.

There was a deficiency, too, of the power of diversion at the Travers'. The dinner was quite correct, and so were the people who were bidden to eat it—correct, but not at all exhilarating. The majority of the guests were clergymen and their help-mates—men who were clergymen because rich livings had been in the gift of their fathers or uncles—men of family, in fact, who served God in good style, and who were as mighty lords temporal in their respective neighbourhoods, as they were lords spiritual—men, who, from being absolute monarchs of all they surveyed in their several spheres, had a correct estimate of the social status and importance of their fellows, and a slightly erroneous one of the social status and importance of all such as were not sons of the Church, or masters of many square acres of the soil—men of classical attainments, of good breeding, and of profound propriety; but centred on themselves in a way that rendered them wearisome to the stranger within their gates, who had a smaller interest, and consequently faith, in conservatism than they themselves.

The talk during dinner had all been about “their schools,” and “their poor.” It had been of an un-

exciting nature, that was not calculated to interfere with the more serious operation for which they had assembled in fact. But after dinner, when the ladies had drifted away into the drawing-room, the men drew their chairs closer together, and a subject that was of solemn interest to several of them was mooted by a gentle-looking, grey-haired old man,—a patriarch among the priests of East Anglia.

“I heard a report to-day from one of my church-wardens, that Brett’s affairs are not in quite such perfect order as we could desire.”

He mentioned one of the most important and oldest of the local banks; and there was a slight, quickly-subdued sensation amongst those who heard him. Walter Goring was the first to speak.

“I am nearly a stranger among you as yet,” he said. “I trust, however, that this news does not concern any of those here present more than it does myself. I heard the report to-day from Mr. Wilfred, one of the Goring Place tenants. He is a depositor; safe enough therefore, I presume. Is it limited liability?”

“No—unlimited,” Henry Fellowes said.

And then the pent-up stream of feeling broke

forth. They talked the subject over long and earnestly—even angrily; for the majority of those present were large shareholders: and in the moment of the first panic they felt as though they stood on shifting sands.

“Let us pray to Heaven that it may be only a temporary tightness, and that the rumour of it won’t get whispered amongst the depositors,” Henry Fellowes said at last. “I hope my wife won’t hear a word of it, poor girl,” he added to Walter Goring, as they crossed the hall together.

And when Goring asked him—“Why not?”

He replied—“Because if she began questioning me as to how far I was interested in its tiding over this difficulty, or breaking completely, I should tell her everything—I couldn’t help myself. And I want her to be happy while she can. God knows where the demands on us may stop. It’s a company concern, you know. Brett’s name was kept on as a tower of strength; but it has been in the hands of a company for years.”

Henry Fellowes spoke nervously and hurriedly; and, judging from this what great interests his friend had at stake, Walter Goring had not the heart to say what he had heard from Wilfred,—

namely, that there would be a tremendous run on Brett's the following day, when any business conduct on the part of directors or secretary that was not absolutely above suspicion would be exploded. The alarm had been sounded in truth; and the luckless shareholders were walking over mined ground. No wonder that the Travers' social gathering lacked the elements of diversion for one who knew nought of these fears and doubts.

"If that's a specimen of a country dinner-party, I shall never wish to go to another, Harry," Charlie said to her husband, as soon as she was out of the Travers' garden, and fairly on her way home that night. And he, remembering only that she might soon drift away out of the sphere of such things and then regret them, forgave the pettishness—or rather gave no thought to it, and clasped her warmly to the heart that was doing a grievous penance of dread, for the love which had prompted him to bring such a woman to such a pass.

The next day a letter was despatched to Frank, inviting him to The Hurst: and scarcely had she written it, before fresh doubt and anxiety assailed Charlie's mind. In a fit of temporary aberration of intellect, on her own wedding-day, she had en-

thusiastically and unwisely bestowed a pressing invitation on Robert Prescott and his wife to come and stay with her at The Hurst as soon as they could, and as long as they could. It was only meet and right, and her bounden duty, considering all the circumstances by which she and they were united, that she should do this. But she acknowledged to herself that she had been unwary in so doing, after a brief sojourn in the Fellowes' tent. "There will not be open war," she said to herself, "but there will be worse. Miss Dinah will make Ellen wretched; and Robert will offend old Mrs. Fellowes at every turn; and they will unite in hating him." She had thought that, after having been half an hour in their society: but still, with her sex's aversion to taking any decided step, she had refrained from saying aught to the Prescotts that could hinder their coming. Now that the missive was posted to Frank, she remembered that Robert and Ellen were likely to come to them in a short time. "If they fight among themselves, it will be awful," she thought, dejectedly; "and I know what Ellen is,—she will be constantly asking me for explanations of things that don't concern her, and that make me miserable,—and that I

won't have Ellen or any one else speaking to me about, for all that."

The more she felt oppressed by the shadow of coming discomfort from her own people, the more she felt inclined to conciliate Mrs. Fellowes, senior. She wished that she had not asked for the library at this special juncture. She was conscious of having made rather a parade about the necessity of having a room entirely to herself. She had demanded it for a specially signified purpose, and now that the room was hers to have and to use as she saw fit, she did begin to entertain grave doubts as to her capability of ever carrying that purpose out. She walked about till her feet ached, arranging and re-arranging the room and the writing-table, putting books, which she had hazy notions she might "want to refer to," within easy distance of the chair she intended to occupy, and rather losing sight, to tell the truth, of the end she had had in view, and towards which she had obtained possession of this room, peace, and a quantity of paper and pens. About one o'clock the appearance of her hardly-gained territory satisfied her, and she sat down to rest from her labours and to wonder where her husband could be. It was the first day since he had

brought his bride to The Hurst that he had not come in at twelve. "I wish he would come," Charlie thought. "I shall not be able to settle to anything while I know I am liable to his coming in at any moment and disturbing me." Then she altered the position of several things once more, and then she made a beginning. That is to say, she wrote, "Chapter the First. Page 1," on the first page of a quire of most wonderful cream-laid letter paper, and then stopped to admire the faultless commencement, and wonder whether she should make her first effort in three volumes or one. Having at length decided in favour of the latter, she went a step further, and inserted the words, "A Tale," at the top of Chapter the First. "A Tale" appeared to her a modest designation, at which none could possibly cavil. On further consideration, she felt, however, that this might be deemed vague, and be held also to evince a want of purpose in its composition, which she was certain of being very far from feeling "when once she was fairly started." There was a slight difficulty about the starting, though; so she gave up literary labour for that day, and read a "Spectator" paper instead.

CHAPTER VI.

FRANK !

NOVEMBER was drawing to a close. Frank, whom Charlie only remembered as the bold, bright, gallant-looking boy, all blue-and-gold, had come down to The Hurst, and dawned upon his delighted sister a bolder, brighter, more gallant-looking man. In the intense pleasure young Mrs. Fellowes had in Frank's society—a pleasure that was composed partly of natural affection and partly of the great liking she had for novelty,—Henry Fellowes's gradually deepening and ill-concealed anxiety passed unobserved by his wife. The rumour as to Brett's was but too well founded. Dull sickening dread reigned at present, but there was shortly to be a call made upon the shareholders, and to many of them it would be a call to ruin.

Charlie was in blissful ignorance of the dire evil

that was coming—that had come upon this land in which her tent had been so recently pitched. In consideration of her being a stranger amongst them, and a little because she was so young a wife, no one made mention of Brett's before her. At the few dinner parties which people still had the heart to give while they were awaiting the crash, pity for Charlie induced silence, and the all-absorbing topic, though "ever on men's lips, was never on their tongues." Therefore, as she never read the local papers, she remained in ignorance of the colossal local wrong that had but just culminated.

Henry Fellowes blessed his brother-in-law for coming to them at this time. It seemed to him impossible that he could have kept the sorrowful secret from Charlie, had Charlie been unemployed and unamused. As it was, Frank was a breath of new life to her, in the which she rejoiced exceedingly; and she loved him all the better for his not being one whit cast down by what she had deemed to be a misfortune when she first heard of it. He was facing his difficulties like a light-hearted lion, she thought, or rather like a man, bearing them blithely, and yet with no bravado.

In truth he was not the kind of man to be cast

down by any such misfortunes as had befallen him. The sum total of human happiness and honours were not contained in H.M. Royal Navy for him. He had not done anything of which he was ashamed, therefore he neither looked nor felt cast down. Consequently, Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah, who regarded him in the light of a burglar, a poacher, or other breaker of the law, declared him to be hardened. Nevertheless, though they felt him to be this, they went with the rest of the world in liking and admiring and believing him to be a superior creature.

Surely there never lived a man more fitted to inspire and retain that warm, blind regard which makes one shut one's eyes to all the faults and follies of the object, and see only its brightness and bravery. He was the type of a Saxon gentleman—tall, stalwart, blue-eyed, with fair hair, soft and fine as a woman's; and he had a marvellous wealth of vitality, and a *débonnaire* bearing that could yet be wondrously deferential to women. He was frank too, as his name, and was altogether such a brother as a sister might reasonably be very proud of possessing.

He had not been in the house two days before

Henry Fellowes confided the coming crash to him. Frank was the most agreeable of confidants in such a case as this—want of money in the future was a thing he could not and did not attempt to realise, so long as he had money enough in the present. “I dare say you will find it all come right in the end, Fellowes,” he said, when Fellowes had finished the doleful story. “Don’t move for a moment, there’s a good fellow.” He was engaged in making a caricature likeness of his brother-in-law, which he presently handed over to that gentleman in the most honest manner possible.

“You don’t quite see the business, Frank,” Mr. Fellowes said dolefully.

“Perhaps not—do you?” Frank replied, taking the sketch back and carefully adding a few finishing touches. In reality he was far from being indifferent as to the ultimate comfort and welfare of his sister and her husband; but it was not in his nature to go into preliminary pain and anxiety on account of any human being—himself not excepted. His brightness was contagious in this instance. Mr. Fellowes immediately expressed himself to the effect of feeling that “though the first pull on him would be a heavy one, keeping things close at The

Hurst for a year or two would set him all straight again, and there might be no further calls; at any rate, it was no use thinking of it yet; would Frank ride round the farm with him?"

They rode round the farm together, and came home by the Brook Green Cottage. A huge van stood at the door, and Mr. Goring sat on his horse at a short distance, superintending the removal of furniture from the same into the house. He rode up to the two men as soon as they appeared, and when he had been introduced to Frank, he said in rather an annoyed tone to Mr. Fellowes:

"I have had a note from your new tenant, Mrs. Walsh, this morning, Fellowes; she says that she sent off her furniture yesterday, and 'will I see that some one puts it in place in the house, as she means to be down to-night.' I sent over a troop of my servants, but they don't seem to get on; she can't go into the house to-night, you know; all the furniture they have come across yet is drawing-room furniture and kettles."

"And they won't make her comfortable to-night, clearly," Henry Fellowes replied, with ready sympathy. "I'll speak to my wife about it; she shall come and see what can be done; or perhaps

she had better send a note here, asking Mrs. Walsh to stay with us at The Hurst until her own house is ready. They are old friends, I believe?"

Walter Goring's mouth twitched as he answered:

"They know each other very well, and it would be doing me a great kindness as well as Mrs. Walsh. She has thrown the whole responsibility upon me, forgetting that I am a bachelor. I would place Goring Place at her absolute disposal, but she wouldn't come there."

"Come up and put the case to my sister yourself," Frank suggested. "I left her copying out some manuscript, and she will be glad of the interruption."

"Mrs. Fellowes has really got so far as to have something to copy out? that's well," Walter Goring said, as he turned his horse's head and rode along by Frank's side.

"Got so far in what?"

"In a charming story, I have no doubt."

Frank laughed.

"It's a work of mine that Charlie is copying out from the rough scraps of paper on which I wrote it first. I have never had the courage to tackle the task myself, but my sister seems to like it."

"It's a bad plan writing on anything that necessitates copying out again," Walter Goring said, sagaciously; "going over it a second time shows you the weak places so clearly, that the end of it is generally to be torn up. I read and revise as thoroughly as I can, but to sit down and copy out in cold blood is beyond me."

Then the fact of the established authorship of the one being alluded to, and the incipient authorship of the other made manifest, the two men went on with that talk of the craft which is pleasant enough to those engaged in it, when successful, but rather tedious to the outsider. Frank asked Goring to recommend him a publisher, and Goring, with beautiful impartiality, recommended six on the spot, carefully refraining from all mention of his own for obvious reasons. Frank's views were rather large, but really looking at him as he rode along—the cold November sun gleaming on his fair bright hair, and his handsome haughty pale face uplifted, he seemed to be justified in entertaining the largest, Walter Goring thought. "There's a look of power about that fellow," the master of Goring Place said to himself; "he will probably do anything he tries to do. The worst of it is he will try too

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many things for a time." Even as he thought it, Frank said :

" I don't expect my first work to bring me much. I have illustrated it very fully, and it will cost a good deal to get it out; therefore I shall agree to publish on that wretched half-profit plan; but I have got the plot of a long serial story, which I shall also illustrate myself, in my head, and I ought to do a good deal with that—don't you think so?"

" We have known the experiment fail—"

" Simply because he couldn't draw," Frank interrupted. " My own belief is, that the educated draughtsman has the power of expressing his ideas in more or less picturesque language; and that the imaginative, and at the same time careful and correct writer, could draw if he tried. In doing both he may never attain to that eminence in one which he might have attained had he left the other untouched; but that the artistic feeling, which is the germ of either fruit, can be made to bear more than one kind, there can be no manner of doubt."

" I have an idea that the result will be greater if that artistic power be concentrated."

" Possibly it may be more paying, but I was not looking at it from that point of view," Frank replied,

standing stoutly to his theory. "I believe that we hold a certain amount of intellectual imaginative power in the hollow of our hands, and that it rests with ourselves in what direction, or in how many directions, we make it work."

"Well, I don't agree with you at present," Walter Goring said, as they rode up to The Hurst; "but I have no doubt but that you will practically illustrate your own views in a short time, and confound me."

Then they went in and found Charlie, very much flushed as to the face and inked as to the fingers, still hard at work copying, from leaves of note-books, backs of envelopes, and other "rough scraps," her brother's MS. work.

She rose up laughing, and pushing her hair back as the men came in, said "I am serving my apprenticeship, you see, Mr. Goring. Frank, I have nearly done half of it, I think."

"You will write original matter with all the greater zest after this labour, Mrs. Fellowes."

"I am afraid not, after Frank's; my own sentences seem to flounder about so loosely after reading his. Now, in the opening chapters of my story I have been trying to get a man out of a room

gracefully; it seems a little thing to do, but I couldn't 'speed the parting guest.' "

"Cultivate that vein, and you'll end by being epigrammatic," Frank laughed.

"Perhaps you liked him too well, Mrs. Fellowes. I know I often cling on to companionship with one of my characters, partly out of liking for them, and—"

"Partly because you are not certain which string it will be wise to pull next," Frank interrupted. "Take my advice, Charlie, and whenever you find yourself in a similar dilemma toss up for it; if your young man makes an untoward appearance by the means, or your young lady seems to lavish herself rather too freely on your readers, they will still comfort themselves under the circumstances by declaring that you have much surprised them, or that your design has marched with their anticipations."

"I'm sure if I were in Charlie's place, I wouldn't bother myself about anything of the sort," Henry Fellowes struck in, rather sadly. It did seem to him a matter of very small importance, indeed, whether or not an ideal creature could be conceived and carried out of the room. Everthing seemed to him of small importance, poor fellow!—save broken

banks, and blighted homes, and blasted honours. His remark was natural enough under the circumstances, but Charlie knew nothing of the circumstances, therefore she, quite naturally too, resented the remark as being of the wet-blanket order.

"It would bother me if I thought I shouldn't succeed in time, Harry; if real hard work would do it, I would work like a galley slave,—but it's a game in which something else must be staked besides honest toil."

"Bravo, little woman!" Frank said, rising up and kissing his sister as she stood—her momentary enthusiasm over—with bent head and downcast eyes, looking very much ashamed of herself.

"You have the right sort of coin, I think," Mr. Goring added. "But to cease from shop, I have come to ask you a favour."

"Which I shall grant, of course,—no! stop though, on this condition, write my name in the book you gave me the other day." She handed the first volume of his novel to him, and he wrote in it—

"Mrs. H. Omry Fellowes,
"With the kindest regards of her fellow-labourer,
"The Author."

She took it back and read it—her eyes flashing as she did so. “Her fellow-labourer.” In this way he plainly indicated his recognition of her as one of them; as one at least who might be of them—of that great band before whom she bent the knees of her heart! The phrase strung her up; it nerved her to bear much in order that she might deserve it. She never forgot it. In doubt, in disappointment, in the hours of toil and the hours of triumph, she always saw that golden legend, and was grateful and hopeful. God bless the men who give the aspirants for a canter on Pegasus a hand up!

“And now for your favour?” she asked, putting down the book; and her eyes and the tone of her voice thanked him more than any words could have done for that which he had written.

“Teach me to introduce comfort into chaos. Mrs. Walsh comes to-night, and must recline upon walnut-wood cabinets and fire-irons, unless you help me.”

“I suggest that you ask her here until the cottage is ready, Charlie dear,” her husband remarked, “and—”

“How can I without your mother’s leave?” she

answered; "get that for me, and I will be the medium of invitation with pleasure."

But though she said this, Walter Goring could not avoid seeing that there was small pleasure to Mrs. Fellowes in the thought of welcoming Mrs. Walsh.

CHAPTER VII.

AGAINST THE GRAIN.

OF course that was an awkward speech which Charlie had made, relative to old Mrs. Fellowes' leave as a necessary preliminary to the invitation. It was an awkward speech, and no one felt the full awkwardness of it so keenly as Charlie herself did the instant she had made it. It was another example of her nerves being too close to her skin. The instant she felt aggrieved, in ever so slight a degree, she showed herself to be aggrieved after her unwise nature. Her husband's remark had irritated her, in that it appeared to underrate her current great object. And she had not been given time to notice the jarred chords before Mrs. Walsh was mentioned to her as one to whom she ought to show careful consideration and attention. The thing seemed to be expected of her by her husband and Walter

Goring, "who ought to have known better," she said angrily to herself; though why he should have known better she would have found it hard to decide, had she been called upon to do so. She was ready and willing to go down and heap coals of fire on the head of the beautiful widow. But she did not quite like it, that Walter Goring should seem to think it only in the order of things that she should put herself out in minor domestic matters, for a woman whom she had only known as the magnificent goddess of a bright metropolitan circle. Young Mrs. Fellowes foamed in her inner self with indignation against the woman who was so "unblushingly following him up;" and was for the moment most irrationally enraged against the supine satisfaction of the man so followed. "He ought to be disgusted with her," she thought; "and her husband only died the other day. I was in hopes that he would have fallen in love with that pretty girl I met him with that night." Poor Charlie! She was only deceiving herself. She would have found flaws in the motives of even that pretty girl, it is to be feared.

"I will answer for Mrs. Fellowes being delighted," Frank put in, good temperedly. "I'll go

and ask her," he added, getting himself out of the room as fast as he could. Accustomed as he was to the ever changing deep, troublous domestic waters were odious to him. He was very fond of his sister Charlie; she amused and interested and touched him greatly, by her admiring love for himself; but "she shouldn't have flung out in that way, because it does no good," he said to himself, with a man's practical clearsightedness in such matters, as he made his way over to Mrs. Fellowes, senior's, domain.

Her own son would have been a far less efficient envoy on this delicate mission. Mrs. Fellowes always looked with lenient eyes upon any request made to her by the brother of the daughter-in-law whom she disliked. Frank had a wonderful way with women; young and old, they succumbed to it and liked it. He had the knack of coming down and being very gentle to them, not as though they needed his gentleness by reason of their own weakness, but he showed that he knew they could claim it from him, as a queen might claim it from a churl.

Old Mrs. Fellowes was knitting away for dear life when he made his appearance before her this

morning. She knew of the dark cloud that was hanging over her son and her son's house, and though she was safe herself,—her own little annual income being invested in something surer than Bretts' bank,—her heart was very sore. She was of that order of womankind which grows harder and grimmer under a sorrow. Frank could not help regarding her as a very unpleasant piece of granite as he entered, and she glued her lips more tightly together by way of noticing the fact.

"I have been round the farm with Fellowes, and we have brought Mr. Goring back with us," he commenced, gaily. He always would take it for granted that people were interested in what he had been doing, and what he was going to do. It was very hard to remain indifferent to aught that concerned him in his presence.

"Mr. Goring is no friend of mine," Mrs. Fellowes replied, rigidly. She could not forget, and she could not forgive, the way in which he had come down, and dared to enjoy himself with his own set, before the county had taken him up. "Mr. Goring is no friend of mine. I suppose it's he is keeping my son away from me now, when I am naturally anxious to know if he

has heard anything fresh about this dreadful business?"

Frank shook his head. "I can tell you that he has heard nothing to-day; it's an awful time for you all," he continued, kindly. "I hope, however, that things will turn out to be better than they seem."

"You must perceive, Mr. St. John, that my son's principal anxiety—indeed, hard as it is for his mother to say it, his only anxiety—is about your sister. I really believe," she continued, with tears of vexation in her eyes, "that if he had not just brought home a wife, he would bear this terrible trial much better than he does."

"I have no doubt he would," Frank replied, calmly; "any fellow would feel the same. Naturally a man would rather cut his throat than get a girl into such a scrape."

"And your sister is *not* the one to make the best of privations. She can't put her hand to a single thing——"

"Oh! can't she?" Frank interrupted. "You don't know her, my dear madam. I fancy she would behave beautifully in rough water. By the way, do you know that Fellowes' new tenant comes down to-night?"

"To Goring Place, I suppose?" Mrs. Fellowes asked, with a severe sneer.

"Not a bit of it; to an empty house, or worse, unless you can induce Charlie to do what she doesn't seem at all inclined to do,—invite her here. Let me be the bearer of your commands to Charlie, that the right thing be done. This lady must not be made to feel that her comfort is of no account among you all at the outset."

"My commands! Ah! Mr. St. John! My commands would be the very last your sister would listen to; if she does not see for herself, that this civility is no more than she, as the wife of the landlord, ought to pay to an incoming tenant—a widow, too!—my opinion will weigh but little with her. I suppose the truth is," she continued severely, "that she is afraid Mr. Goring will not be able to devote so much of his time and attention and tomfoolery to her now his old friend is coming?"

"I don't know about that," Frank replied, carelessly; "but I shall just go and tell Charlie that you say it is to be done, and leave her no further excuse for not doing it." Then he returned to the library, and threw up his cap as he entered,

exclaiming, "The mother-in-law greeting! Mrs. Walsh is to be implored not to repose upon the frying-pans, but to honour the poor abode of The Hurst with her presence till such time as the cottage can be made comfortable." And Walter Goring, as he saw Mrs. Fellowes sit down to write her note, had the uncomfortable feeling of one who fears that a great fuss has been made about the obtaining of a boon, which the one to be benefited may, perchance, refuse when it is offered. "She may resent it as impertinent interference on Mrs. Fellowes' part, and blow me up to the sky about it," he thought: "women are such rum animals, addicted so invariably to being fierce in the wrong place." However, the deed was done now; so he only thanked Charlie with great politeness for her "prompt partizanship with himself," when the letter was written and sent off to the station to meet Mrs. Walsh whenever it should please that fiery brand to arrive.

"And now," Charlie said, with the air of one who was midway through a disagreeable task, and required refreshment, "we'll go in to luncheon, if you please." They went in accordingly, carrying Mr. Goring along with them, which extravagance

caused Mrs. Fellowes to refuse butter with her cheese, and prefer beer to wine. "She must ask all the neighbourhood to stay with her and to luncheon, and her husband on the very brink of ruin," the old lady cried piteously to her daughter that afternoon. "I'm sure it makes my blood run cold to hear her laughing and going on, and Henry won't have a word said to her. Oh, no! she's too precious to hear the truth."

"She'll hear it soon enough," Miss Dinah said, with a certain air of sublime satisfaction in poetical justice.

"Soon enough! Yes, when he can't keep it from her any longer. His folly about her is past all bounds, and exceeds belief. Mrs. Travers said to me only yesterday, 'it exceeds belief, Mrs. Fellowes, I assure you—that it does.'"

There was something absolutely beautiful in Mrs. Fellowes' profound reliance on Mrs. Travers' assurance that the folly of the master of The Hurst in this matter "exceeded all belief." The thing had been said, therefore it must be. The word of her neighbour ranked next in order of indisputableness and infallibility to the Word of God with Mrs. Fellowes.

"If I could only see her sit down with her needle, or take to doing something, no matter how little, about the house, I should be better satisfied as to what will become of her," Mrs. Fellowes resumed solemnly. She was of that order of mind which would have advised keeping the bed of the Atlantic nice and dry by means of a bucket.

"Ah!" Miss Dinah replied sententiously, "it must be a good needle to mend Bretts' business; if it comes to the worst she will have to do a little more than she bargained for when she married my poor brother."

"The worst day's work he ever did," his mother struck in pathetically. A stranger might have been forgiven for imagining that Charlie had wrought all the evil—they upbraided her so for having been brought into it.

"I shouldn't at all wonder if she wants to go back to her own people, if they will have her," Miss Dinah remarked.

"Nor should I, if they'll have her; but her brother-in-law has a family, and cannot be expected to maintain other men's wives. Ah! if Henry had married as I wished him to marry, there would have been ready money enough to satisfy all de-

mands. There was Miss Hughes worshipped the ground he trod upon, and Miss Walker would have jumped at him—yes, jumped at him.”

“You know you never let Henry look at either of them twice, mother,” Miss Dinah said, bluntly.

“Only because I didn’t want him to marry without due consideration ; you see what the result of his going off and relying on his own judgment entirely is ?” Mrs Fellowes replied triumphantly.

“She didn’t break the bank anyway,” Miss Dinah replied, stolidly. She was a good, hearty hater ; she would dislike—and show her dislike—without the shadow of a cause. But she would not condescend to the meanness of getting up a false cause of hatred. When her daughter said that, Mrs. Fellowes declared “that she knew herself to be only an old woman, who had no business to speak, and that in future she would never open her lips about anything” after the manner of ill-tempered, illogical old women who find themselves conversationally worsted.

Meanwhile Charlie and her brother and Mr. Goring had gone out for a walk, and the subject which the two men had been discussing in the morning was once more broached. Charlie said, rather

deprecatingly, that she must either be the exception to Frank's rule, or that she had no artistic feeling. "I can write—I have ideas to express, and words at command to express them—but I can't draw a line," she said, pathetically.

"Don't regret it, Mrs. Fellowes; your brother and you will work all the better for it. Bring all the talent of the family to bear upon one work; you do the letterpress, and let him illustrate it."

"A sort of 'Week on the Waters,' or 'Month on the Mountains,' or 'Days in the Dales' business?" Frank asked.

"Heaven forbid! No, we have had enough gentlemanly guide books for this generation. No; a serial story illustrated ought to sell well, now that none of the giants are in the field with one. Is the tale you have commenced sufficiently elastic for the purpose, Mrs. Fellowes?"

"I am afraid not. It's the story of a childish love which grows with their growth, and at last ripens into an engagement."

"Of course; but lengthen it by making him jilt her, or her jilt him—its immaterial which, so long as one does it."

"She *couldn't*, with her character," Charlie re-

plied sincerely; "but he does jilt her, and then when Nemesis overtakes him the story is over."

"Is it indeed? The majority of jilted young ladies would hardly thank you for taking that for granted, I'm thinking. Well, hold Nemesis in with a tight hand for a time; reward your hero for the evil he has done very gradually; violent poetical justice rarely does overtake people in real life, you know."

"Would it not be almost truer to nature to let them go unpunished, as they do in real life very often?" she asked.

"It might be good nature, but carried too far it would be crude art. In real life we don't see the Nemesis that overtakes our fellow sinners; but in a work of fiction the hell that a man has made for himself should be painted; if the sinner goes on smiling and seeming serene through nine hundred pages——"

"One naturally imbibes the idea that in the eyes of the writer it's rather a fine thing to be a sinner, and it won't do for you to give colour to that idea, young lady; that is what Mr. Goring means, I think. At any rate I do," Frank said, taking his sister's hand and drawing it through his arm; "however, we will start the story the first spare

day we have, and I shall revise you thoroughly as you go along."

"I will be a more impartial critic; let me undertake that part of the affair," Walter Goring asked. So the three were united in the work of the future.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PAINFUL MEETING.

IF it were stated that Daisy got on well with the Osbornes, the statement would not stand investigation. She stayed with them; she slept under the same roof with them, and partook of viands with them, and sat in the same pew on Sundays with them. But for all this similarity of pursuit she did not get on well with them.

She was too old and too perverse for the place. Mrs. Osborne would have been angelically good and kind to her had she accepted the goodness and kindness in a feeling spirit; but this she could not do. Mrs. Osborne wanted to order her outgoings and incomings—or at least to appear to order them—and even against so much exercise of the authority which Walter had vested in the lady of the house Daisy girded. “It isn’t that I suspect you

of going anywhere, or seeing anyone where you shouldn't go and whom you shouldn't see," the duenna would urge; to which Daisy would reply—

"And it is not that I want to go anywhere or see anyone in particular, but I hate to be suspected. My guardian said I wasn't a prisoner, and I won't be treated as though I were one."

She was in truth a wayward young lady, an awful charge, an odious responsibility. Mrs. Osborne would have suffered much to be well and decently rid of her. Miss Daisy was the heaviest cross a limited income had yet laid upon that estimable woman. "When Miss Goring had been under my roof for a whole month, I knew no more about her than I did the day she came," the matron lady would say to inquiring friends in after-days, when Daisy Goring was of the past. Not that Daisy maintained a cold or even an apparently reserved demeanour with Mrs. Osborne. On the contrary, the young lady, for the first eight weeks of her residence in the detached villa, was remarkably loquacious and lively. It is true, however, that her loquacity and liveliness never led her on to say a word which Mrs. Osborne could use as evidence of her charge's antecedents, and family history.

Her education did not progress very rapidly, nor did the desire to emulate Miss Osborne possess her in the slightest degree. It was in vain that the fond mother strove to make maternal vanity serve a good end by perpetually citing Alice's achievements to Daisy. Daisy would listen to the well-meant vaints with careless civility, and graciously observe when they were concluded, that "Alice certainly had a wonderful power of plodding." So far, however, from being excited to parallel plodding herself, she refused the singing lessons which Mrs. Osborne put in her path, saying, that the lady whom they used as an instrument "had a bad method." "A bad method! when she gives the first lessons in the neighbourhood," Mrs. Osborne said in indignant comment; "such a self-sufficient young lady as Miss Goring it has never been my fate to meet."

Nor was there much sympathy between Daisy and her companion Alice Osborne. The latter had suffered herself to be dazzled, and, as it were, put in an inferior position from the very first. Daisy's gift of seeming had imposed upon the substantial mind that believed honestly that to do anything well one must understand it thoroughly. Alice

Osborne was good and sound and true herself; therefore when Daisy talked bright nonsense, she dazzled the girl, who had yet to learn that the language of exaggeration covereth a multitude of ignorances very often.

Having lived a simple, solitary life with her mother from her infancy, Alice was rather inclined to sentimentalism—sentimentalism of the safer sort, be it understood, of the Helen and Hermia order. But when she proposed this alliance to Daisy, Daisy derided the idea. “How delightful it will be for us to read and work together in the garden,” Alice said. “Mamma has given me ‘Wordsworth’ for my birthday this year, and last year she gave me ‘Cowper;’ we’ll go through them together.”

“Isn’t Cowper the man who hopped about his room with hares?” Daisy asked.

“Oh, lovely lines he wrote to them.”

“I daresay he did; but I don’t care to read them, you see,” Daisy replied frankly, and Alice felt herself rebuffed.

Day after day, as Miss Goring’s own riding-horse and groom came round to the villa, did Mrs. Osborne persistently remark, “It’s a pity Alice isn’t going with you,—so much pleasanter for you

than going alone ; but it's too late to send for a horse for her to-day ;" and Daisy as persistently replied, " I assure you I don't at all mind riding alone." It had been an understood thing before Walter left that companionship in her rides was never to be forced upon Miss Goring ; but Mrs. Osborne was determined that her charge should be given every chance of coming round gracefully into a proper state of mind on the matter.

Judging from the time she stayed out, Miss Goring must have ridden long distances ; she always brought her horse home in a lather too ; it was certain, therefore, that the time had not been spent in quiet riding. The trusty groom, when questioned on this subject, as he was sometimes by the housemaid while he was waiting for his young mistress at the door, was frank and disarming to a degree. " Where ? Why, all over them downs, at a splitting pace. I never saw a young lady so fond of hard riding in my life."

" And always alone too ?" the housemaid would say suggestively, to which proposition the trusty groom would give a prompt and intelligent assent. " Yes, always alone ; it's my belief she couldn't hold that chestnut in if any one rode with her."

It was evident, on indisputable authority, that Daisy was justified in preferring to take her eager steed out by herself.

The 1000*l.* which she had asked her cousin Walter to let her have, and not to question her about, had been placed to her account at a Brighton bank. The day after it had been paid in, she drew out 400*l.* of it, made the notes up into a square packet on which she wrote, "With Daisy's love," and directed them to—

"MRS. FITZGIBBON,

"Clare Cottage,

"Brompton Lane, W."

This packet she registered and posted herself, and that night she awoke from a dream of a fair, sad-looking woman, like herself, but much older and prettier, kissing and blessing her. She awoke from this dream, sobbing and crying, "Mother, Mother!" There was no sign, save the post-mark, given of Daisy's own place of abode on that packet of wealth, consequently, Mrs. Fitzgibbon, of Clare Cottage, never acknowledged the receipt of it.

She wrote to, and heard from her guardian regularly about once a fortnight, and as she did not

hold a fluent pen, this was the most serious occupation of her life. The false starts she made were a caution to Mrs. Osborne not to leave too many quires of note-paper about, as Daisy had a habit of commencing "Dear Cousin Walter," on eight or nine sheets before she could determine within herself what to say next. These sheets Mrs. Osborne had more than once taken up, and written state effusions on the fair portion of them to the finest of her friends, oblivious of the fact of Miss Daisy's failure on the other side. Letter-writing was clearly not a speciality of Miss Goring, or else she imagined that Walter would be far more critical about her performances than he was in reality. Utter prostration of spirit was sure to be her portion when the day came round for her Goring Place letter, and she would gnash the teeth of her soul at Mrs. Osborne, when that lady kindly reminded her of the fact, as she rarely failed to do at breakfast. The sole comfort she had under the infliction was, that Walter wrote her such short letters that he couldn't possibly expect long ones from her in return.

One day she was surprised—it almost appeared, indeed, as if she was horribly startled—by a visit from Mary Levinge. She was up in her

own room when the lady's name was announced to her, and in her first excitement she condescended to seek aid from the gentle and systematically repulsed Alice. "Tell Miss Osborne I want her," she said to the servant who had told her of Miss Levinge's arrival. Then she followed the servant out on to the landing, and corrected herself meekly: "Ask Miss Osborne, if she will be kind enough to come to me, I mean."

Alice went to her at once, and found her with her yellow hair hanging loosely over her shoulders; her face was flushed, and her eyes sparkling, and she altogether looking very pretty. "Isn't it unfortunate," she began quickly, as Alice came into the room, "the first time a visitor comes for me, I'm not ready to see her. Will you go down—and—and do the pretty and polite to her, and then let me know what she wants?"

Alice was amiable, accommodating and meek, but she was also conscientious; she was in the middle of an Italian lesson, and she felt that neither her master's time nor her mother's money might be wasted. *Her* future was chalked out for her. She was being "educated for a governess."

"I can't, dear. I am only half through my

lesson, and Mr. Gatti must go in ten minutes ; you can always do your hair in half a minute, you know ! ”

“Very well ; don’t trouble yourself and waste your time in giving me advice,” Daisy replied, sharply. Then as Alice left the room, Daisy sat down before the glass, and put her yellow locks up with trembling fingers. The tears rushed up into her eyes too, and her lips quivered visibly. “What a fool I am,” she cried angrily, at last, struggling to compose herself, but she did not succeed very well. Her face was piteous to behold, from its mingled expression of nervousness and anxiety, when she finally presented herself before Miss Levinge.

That lady’s back was towards the door when Daisy entered. Miss Levinge was standing before a Parian cast of Ariadne on her panther, surveying it critically. She turned round, smiling heartily when she heard the door open, and greeted Daisy with outstretched hand, and the words,—

“Are you very much astonished to see me ? ”

The smile had completely reassured Daisy ; in a moment she regained her self-possession ; the old look of almost impertinent indifference overspread

her face, and banished the anxious expression of an instant before, as she answered,—

“Yes; rather. I thought you were in Rome.”

“No; we were prevented going when we had intended in October, so now we mean to wait till after Christmas. My mother and I return alone; and I tell you what, Daisy”—she rose, and placed her arm on Daisy’s arm as she spoke—“I wish you would go there with us for a time: it would be a new life for you; you would like it.”

Daisy drew a deep breath.

“Go to Rome with you!—why?”

“Why; because I think you would be happy with us; and the change would do you good.” Mary Levinge slightly tightened her clasp on Daisy’s arm as she spoke, and Daisy blushed a little; then she laughed her bird-like laugh and shook her head.

“I don’t know what my guardian would say to this plan; and I don’t want to be done good to. But you are very kind—very kind *indeed*—to have thought of me.”

She got up as she spoke, and put her arms suddenly round Miss Levinge’s neck, and her lips on Miss Levinge’s cheek. It was a sudden impulse

with her, and when she had done it she drew back half abashed.

“We often think of you, dear Daisy,” Mary Levinge said, heartily; “are you sure that a change wouldn’t be good for you—are you quite sure that you are well and happy?”

She asked the question in a peculiarly impressive tone; and once more Daisy blushed as she replied,—

“Yes; quite sure.”

“As to what your guardian would say to the plan I propose,” Mary Levinge went on, “I am quite sure that Walter Goring would consent to it, and think it a good one. I have not said anything to him yet, because I wanted to know if you would like it yourself. I wish you would like it, Daisy?”

Daisy moved restlessly in her chair.

“I think it so kind of you,” she said earnestly—
“you don’t know how kind I think it of you; it seems ungrateful to say that I shouldn’t like it, but I don’t think I should, really. What should I do there?”

“Do?—do the same and better things there than you do here, Daisy; for example, get more correct notions as to beauty and art than you will gain

from that rubbish, for instance," and she nodded her head as she spoke towards Ariadne.

"They would be no use to me if I got them. How's your sister?"

"She is very well, she is going to be married; that is the reason we stayed in England so long, and that my mother and I go home alone. She's going to be married to a young clergyman—just fancy it! You don't inquire for Laurence?"

"How is he? I was going to ask," Daisy said, hurriedly.

"He's as well as an idle man with little to live upon can be," Mary Levinge replied slowly; "and he's as happy as a man whose great aim in life is heiress-hunting deserves to be. Thank God, child, that he is not your brother, and that you need not have anything to do with him."

It was not a sisterly speech. Mary Levinge must have had strong reasons indeed for uttering it. The girl she addressed thought her hard, cruel, hatefully unjust; but she was none of these things. She only strove to save.

"Are you going to Goring Place again before you leave England?" Daisy asked, abruptly turning the conversation.

"I am afraid that we shall have no time; the fact is, Sybil is so absorbed in her love's young dream, that she leaves all the arrangements for her marriage entirely in our hands; you know that Mrs. Walsh has gone to live in Deneham?"

"Gone down to marry Walter, I believe." Daisy laughed; then she added warmly, "Well, he is a darling fellow, and he deserves the best and most beautiful wife in the world."

While she was saying this, Mrs. Osborne sailed in, and asked Miss Goring's guest to stay to luncheon. Mary Levinge remained for an hour or two longer, but though she put the Roman plan as pleasantly as she could before Daisy several times, Daisy persisted in utterly negating it, and Mary Levinge departed at last, baffled in her good intent. "I warned Walter, and I have tried to put him on his guard as well as I could," she thought with a sigh, as she drove away to the station; "but while I have nothing but vague suspicions, and my knowledge of Laurence to act upon, I can do nothing."

During the next few weeks after Miss Levinge's visit, Daisy was unprecedentedly acquiescent in all the Osborne arrangements. She took gentle exer-

cise on the pier with the mother and daughter from twelve till one daily. She wearied her brains under Mr. Gatti's auspices. She herself made honourable mention of a certain little black mare named 'Ada' which was reported to carry a lady admirably, and which the chestnut had fraternised with to such a degree in the stable, that Daisy thought Miss Osborne might accompany her in her rides with safety, not to say pleasure. She made herself agreeable according to her lights in fact, and seemed to be trying to forget something and live in the passing hours alone.

But this sunny period was not destined to last. One chill clear morning the horses and the Italian master were simultaneously announced. Alice could not go out with Daisy, so Daisy went out alone.

She seemed to be tired of exploring the Sussex downs and lanes. She rode for a couple of miles or so inland this morning, and then she came back and cantered slowly up and down the parade for a time. Cantered up and down in an obviously purposeless way. There was no pleasure to her in riding in this place, and she knew none of the people.

Presently she brought the mare up sharply, and seemed to the observant eyes of the trusty groom to reel in her saddle. The garish nature-forsaken landscape, and the glaring sea-view seemed to quiver and rock before her eyes as she drew rein for an instant in tender hope, and slackened it the next in terrible humiliation.

At about the distance of five yards from her a little group were pausing to listen to the strains of a German band. The group consisted of a sickly, sad, pretty looking woman in a bath chair, a middle-aged gentleman, and a young girl of fourteen. The lady when Daisy caught sight of her first, was leaning her pretty wasted cheek on her hand, and looking away into vacancy; the gentleman was bending over the side of her chair, speaking to her apparently as though he desired to arouse her interest.

Presently the invalid looked up and saw the young girl on the chestnut horse on the outside of the railings. Daisy was leaning slightly forward, with a wofully piteous, wildly loving look in her eyes. She had drawn her reins tightly by this time, and the fine-mouthed horse was settling back on its haunches in a way that would have done no discredit

to the steed of a circus-queen, and his rider was leaning forward, looking, with all her heart in her eyes, at the little group I have described.

Instantly the gentleman looked round, following the direction that the invalid lady's eyes took, and his glance fell on the young equestrian. He looked coldly at her, past her, through her, as it seemed to her, and she heard him say to the chair-man—"Go home at once." Then the chair was pushed on; the little group was gone, and Daisy was left alone to quiet the horse whose mouth she had so sorely worried for nothing.

There was no word spoken by any member of that little group until they reached their hotel. Then when the lady had been sedulously helped up to her own room by her husband, he began—

"Was *this* the reason of your anxiety to come to Brighton, Marguerite?"

"Don't be so hard, when you see how ill I am," she answered piteously. She looked such a frail, delicate woman as she sat there trembling in a chair at the foot of the bed, against which she seemed striving to steady herself.

"Why try to put yourself in the way of meeting

her when you know my resolution? Why pain yourself and insult me?"

He was not the style of man whose appearance would command respect for any resolution he might issue. A flabby loose-looking man, with watery heavy blue eyes, he was one whom the superficial observer might imagine could be moulded easily. But his wife was no superficial observer; she knew his inflexibility of purpose only too well.

"You took the money she sent,—my poor girl!" she said, shivering as she spoke. "I thought after that if I did chance to meet her *alone* you would have let me."

She stopped and began to sob, covering her face with her hands, like the poor broken creature she was.

Her husband gave vent to an impatient exclamation, and commenced walking up and down the room; suddenly he paused right in front of her.

"The money was taken for *your* comfort, Marguerite; be just to me; remember that never a penny of it have I spent on myself!"

She moved her hand towards him deprecatingly, and her sob almost swelled into a wail as he went on.

"I forgave the deception you practised on me for

fifteen years in calling your daughter your niece ; when the ghastly truth came out, I asked you to choose between our poor little children and myself, and that child of sin and shame——”

“ Don't ! ” she gasped feebly.

“ What ? ”

“ Don't say any more now.” It had been her bane and weakness through all her life that she would put things off. She shrank from saying or hearing hard truths, the poor irresolute unhappy creature. Respite for an hour, he would take a full pleasure in life, and almost forget. So now she pleaded with lip and eye, and imploring gesture of the hand, that he would say “ nothing more just now.”

She had been such a pretty woman, this poor mother of Daisy's. Even now her little delicate-featured face and soft blue eyes, and pale brown hair, were almost lovely when she was not frightened, in spite of those years of secret suffering and remorse, and the last few months of open shame.

She was the first to speak after she had asked him to give her quarter ; he had ceased from his reproaches with a little grunt, for he knew well that if he continued them she would speedily bring her heart complaint to bear upon him, and then some

strange doctor would be called in, and the eternal caution, "My dear sir, you *must* take care that Mrs. Fitzgibbon is not agitated," would be poured into his ears. So when he saw the preliminary signs, he ceased from his reproaches with an ill-used grunt. Presently she resumed.

"And as for forgiving, you're *always* telling me of it."

"Perhaps we had better not go into the subject again, Marguerite," he said, temperately. She thought she had gained a slight vantage, and that it would be well to pursue it.

"And it's scarcely manly of you, considering that I threw myself upon your mercy, and—"

He cut the sentence short by going out and slamming the door, and when her nerves recovered the shock, she languidly put off her bonnet and shawl, and knelt down crying wearily, and praying wildly for Daisy and—for death.

At the same hour Daisy, locked in her own room at Mrs. Osborne's, was packing up a few of her clothes and trinkets, labouring away at her task with hands that were too tremulous to do very efficient work. She scarcely saw the things that were before her, her eyes were burning so fiercely

with the hot tears which she would not let fall as she recalled every line of the face and figure, worn thin by suffering long and harsh, which she had seen on the parade. And her heart meanwhile ached horribly with pity for the mother whom she loved the more for their mutual wrong.

CHAPTER IX.

HOSTESS AND GUEST.

THE new tenant of the Brook-green Cottage had arrived. At first when she read Mrs. Fellowes' note of invitation, which was awaiting her at the station, she said, "Very civil of her; but I shall prefer going to my own house at once." But presently she grew more acquiescent to the scheme, for Mr. Goring—who had been careful to meet her also—backed Charlie's note very judiciously.

"I wouldn't say a word in favour of your going there or anywhere else where you didn't care to go," he said; "but just now there's a cloud over The Hurst." Then he told her what the cloud was, and described the state of the cottage; and she looked and felt very sorry. Like a true woman, however, she would not even give Charlie full credit for all the misery that might possibly come upon

her. The same feeling which prompted Cleopatra to ask of Antony, "Can Fulvia die?" made Mrs. Walsh say,

"Her brother-in-law—that odious man with the mile of upper lip—is a clever lawyer enough. Probably he looked after her settlements." Then she took Walter's arm, and walked away to the carriage, which he had waiting for her.

"It all goes, I fear—he had settled so many shares upon her," he answered, as he handed her in. Then he took off his hat, and she found that he was not going to accompany her. She leant forward hastily, as he closed the door,

"Walter! you are coming with me?"

"To-night—after your journey!" (it was about eight o'clock). "You will be too tired to care for more than the family circle. By the way, collect your impressions of old Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah, and give them to me to-morrow."

"A resident mother and sister-in-law too! Poor girl! how very uncomfortable she must have been as Miss St. John it makes one think! Well, if you won't come, Mr. Goring, tell him to take me to this place, wherever it may be." Then she drew back her face encircled with the widow's bonnet-cap, and

Walter gave the word for her to be driven to The Hurst.

The whole family, with the exception of Frank, were drawn up in the drawing-room to receive her. Frank had declined to make one of them on the occasion. "I would rather first dawn upon her dazzled vision at the breakfast-table in my fresh bloom," he said, in reply to his sister's request that he "would be there and make himself agreeable." The fact is, Frank had no very clear notions respecting Mrs. Walsh. He knew that this meeting would be the first that had taken place between Mrs. Walsh and Charlie since the death of the former's husband. It occurred to him, as being within the bounds of possibility, that Mrs. Walsh might cry, or, at least, look bereft. Therefore he determined on keeping out of the way until the earlier emotion had subsided.

Moreover, he was engaged upon a very pleasant and congenial task, and he had just got into the fling of it, as it were. This was none other than a poem in heroic measure, enlivened by comic drawings, illustrative of the respective careers of Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah. He had just arrived at that part of it where Mrs. Fellowes first discovered

herself to be the mother of a marriageable son. The stern rectitude expressed in her little shawl, and the maternal solicitude in her face, as the daughters of the land approached him immediately after the discovery, "deserved careful study, and an evening's uninterrupted work," he declared. Accordingly, he had retired to the library, where he sat happily, smoking and drawing, and occasionally singing short scraps of song, or whistling favourite melodies, leaving Charlie to face her guest alone.

For Charlie was terribly alone when left with the Felloweses—every one of them—in these days. Her husband, oppressed with anxiety for her principally, was more gloomy and depressed when with her alone than he was with anyone else. He lived in constant dread of her questioning him as to the cause of this change, and yet he could not, for the life of him, be as he had been of yore. Truth to tell, Charlie gave very little thought to the matter. She felt that there was a change in her husband, but she had no desire to analyse the cause of it, and no particular sorrow in its continuance. That feeling of having made a terrible bungle of the threads of her life was still her paramount one ;

and she lacked the heart—and the motive—to strive to unravel those threads just yet.

Regularly at intervals of about ten minutes from the moment the clock struck seven this evening, poor Charlie had to listen to ejaculations of surprise from either Mrs. Fellowes or Miss Dinah as to the non-appearance of the guest. It was useless reminding them that there would not be another down train till eight. They chose to believe that Mrs. Walsh had arrived at some earlier hour, and was walking about in the wet, or sitting on the railway platform, for the sake of keeping them expectant.

“Ah! it’s always the way,” the old lady observed: “you go and interfere in what doesn’t concern you, and *this* is the return you get!”

“It does show one the folly of running after strangers!” Miss Dinah said, decisively.

“Especially strangers who have shown beforehand that they don’t at all regard the usages of society.”

“I call it using the house as if it were an hotel. It’s like saying, ‘I shall come in when I like, and I don’t care whether you sit up for me, or not.’”

“Such impertinence! ’tis exactly like it! I shouldn’t wonder when she *does* come, if she brings

her Mr. Goring with her, and the two sit up and carouse !”

Charlie had merely marked her observance of this conversation by moving from a chair to a sofa, lying down upon the latter restlessly for a minute, and then getting up again, and resuming her chair. But when Mrs. Fellowes culminated in the last remark, Charlie laughed. She checked herself almost immediately, saying, as they both looked angrily at her,

“I really beg your pardon, Mrs. Fellowes. But there was something so funny in the notion that I couldn’t help——” She stopped, and laughed again, as she thought how Frank would enjoy it when she told him.

“Funny !” Mrs. Fellowes ejaculated, in holy horror—“something so funny in a widow, whose poor dear husband is hardly cold in his grave, putting a whole household out in this way, and making herself town-talk with a young man !”

“She hasn’t done it yet, remember, mother !” Miss Dinah put in ; “and Mrs. Henry only meant that your idea was funny—not that Mrs. Walsh’s doing it would be so.”

“I wish to Heaven she had not been asked, if

there is going to be all this fuss about it," Henry Fellowes exclaimed, suddenly. Those about him had imagined that he had been giving no heed to the conversation—that he had not been listening; but he had, and loathing it all as men do loathe the puerile in presence of a painful reality.

Charlie went over, and knelt down, leaning on the arm of her husband's chair, when he brought himself into the conversation in this way. She bent her head towards him—it was not nearly so much like a boy's as when he had married her—and said,

"I wish it, too, dear; but let us make the best of things, Harry."

He put one hand down upon her wavy curls, and with the other turned her face up towards him. He looked at her long and earnestly, and it seemed to him that there was so much in her face to which he had no clue. Her bright fitful glances, the ever-varying expression of her mouth, the shade on her forehead, which deepened or decreased each moment—all these were so many sealed books to him; and half unconsciously he recognised them to be so. An undefined jealous dread of some one reading them and understanding them while he still

stayed in the dark, seized him, and he released his hold of her with an abruptness that almost seemed to tell her to stand off.

"What is it, Harry," she asked, anxiously, clasping her arms over his knees, and leaning upon him with an air of reliance that was the offspring of the mute appeal against his dawning doubt; and he replied:

"I don't know; get up; don't be foolish, Charlie; get up; I hear wheels."

She sprang to her feet on the instant, and she vowed, while doing so, that never in that way would she be foolish again.

Mrs. Walsh was announced almost immediately. She came in stately and collected as usual, but with an uncomfortable feeling in her inner self, composed of the half suspicion she had that Charlie did not like her, and the half certainty that she did not like Charlie. The knowledge that evil days were coming upon young Mrs. Fellowes was the salvation of that meeting between the two ladies. Had it not been for that, and the womanly pity it engendered in her heart, Mrs. Walsh would have been uncommonly disagreeable in her frigid beauty. As it was, she almost thawed to Charlie, and so caused that impressionable being to feel very much ashamed of

herself for that she had not been better inclined towards her guest.

Mrs. Walsh spared Charlie all trouble in the matter of introduction. After shaking hands with her young hostess, who was striving hard to say something civil, and failing by reason of some old memories surging up, Mrs. Walsh held out her hand to Mr. Fellowes with the words :

“ We will dispense with any formal introduction, will we not ? ” And there was a cordial tone about these words, and such a gracious smile accompanied them, that Henry Fellowes thought : “ Call *that* woman stupid or cold ! she’s the most charming creature I ever met.” There was a nameless something in her manner that made him feel that she had heard—and that she believed all manner of good things—of him ; and his was such a thorough honest, kindly nature, that it gloried and rejoiced exceedingly in being thought well of by every one—not from vanity this, be it understood, but because it was his nature to like and think well of every one, and he craved some small return in kind.

“ Mrs. and Miss Fellowes I know by sight already,” Mrs. Walsh continued, shaking hands with them in rapid succession almost as she named them.

"I used to see you at Deneham Church when I was staying at Goring Place."

"Yes, I believe you were there once," Miss Dinah said, looking steadily at the guest.

"And that was when I saw you," Mrs. Walsh replied affably. Then she turned to Charlie and said—

"How more than good of you to take me in, Mrs. Fellowes. Mr. Goring tells me that there is not a decent hotel in the place; what should I have done to-night had it not been for your consideration? for they have been shamefully lazy at the cottage—there's nothing in order."

"So she has seen him already," Charlie thought. "He never said a word about going to meet her to-night."

Old Mrs. Fellowes replied aloud to Mrs. Walsh's remark. "There are two most respectable inns in Deneham—hotels I believe are not often found in small country places, but the Red Lion is kept by an old servant of my own, who's so honest that you might leave untold gold about and he'd never touch it, and so clean that you might eat off his floors."

"Being neither a *Cræsus* nor a pig," Mrs. Walsh was about to say; but she checked herself, and

Charlie asked her if she "wouldn't like to go to her own room?" When they were gone away together, Mrs. Fellowes, senior, commenced.

"I wonder whether she wears widow's caps with decent close borders, or only one of those fly-away things with a point on the forehead?"

"I wonder whether she wears one at all, in the house," Miss Dinah replied. "I have my doubts; did you see that she had a seal-skin jacket on, mother?"

Mrs. Fellowes smiled and elevated her eyebrows. "I saw," she said; "that's what men who go and marry fine ladies may expect."

"Why, she was all in black, mother," Henry Fellowes interposed; "uncommonly fine woman she is, to be sure."

"Oh! uncommonly fine, and she *knows it*," Mrs. Fellowes replied with solemn emphasis, as though there were something dark and dangerous in such knowledge,—*"pretty manners, too!"*

"Her manners are much like Mrs. Henry's, I think," Dinah said; and there was a wealth of sisterly kindness in the saying, considering what had gone before.

"Very like indeed," Mrs. Fellowes replied.

"What is the day of the month,—the 20th, isn't it?"

"Yes, the 20th of December," Henry Fellowes said cheerfully; on the whole he was glad that the tone of the conversation was about to be changed as he thought.

"Yes—20th of December," Mrs. Fellowes resumed; "and take my word for it, that before the 20th of May she will have married that young man at Goring Place; she'll never be content with a poor dear husband in his grave, not she; she hasn't the look nor the manners to be it."

Meanwhile Charlie had accompanied her visitor to the state, that is, the most sepulchral, chamber, and while they were waiting for Mrs. Walsh's maid to make her appearance, the two ladies interchanged a few detective civilities.

"It's rather a dismal old house this, isn't it?" Charlie began. "I think you will find it rather a dismal neighbourhood too, unless you have some very intimate friends near here."

Mrs. Walsh removed her bonnet, and raised a pair of candles aloft, in order to see her hair the better before she answered.

"It's the want of gas makes it seem dark to us.

Intimate friends ? No—only Mr. Goring. Do you see much of him ? ”

“ Yes—no—that is, not half so much as I could wish,” Charlie replied ; “ if there was a lady at Goring Place—if he only does marry his pretty cousin, we should be something like neighbours I think.”

“ For your sake then, I can only hope that that remarkably auspicious event may come off,” Mrs. Walsh replied, calmly completing her survey of her hair, and not disfiguring it according as old Mrs. Fellowes had hoped. Then she turned and looked at Charlie, thinking, “ It is evident that she knows nothing of this banking business, poor thing, or she could not speak about what may occur in that way.” As she stood looking down at Charlie, the latter suddenly glanced up and met her eyes.

“ What were you thinking just then, Mrs. Walsh ? ” she asked abruptly.

“ Of you.”

“ And I of you, or at least of that evening when we met last.”

“ That evening when you first met Mr. Goring, do you mean ? ” Mrs. Walsh interrupted.

“ Yes,” Charlie answered ; and then she thought

to herself, "Mrs. Walsh will imagine *that* fact is rather too strongly impressed upon me unless I tell her my reasons for thinking about it," so she added: "I always recall that evening pleasantly, because an idea was put into my head then which I hope to turn to good account in the future. I have always wished to write, and Mr. Goring says it won't be very idiotic of me to try."

"That's immensely encouraging on Mr. Goring's part," Mrs. Walsh replied, laughing. "Well, I can only say that I have been thrown in the way of hearing a good deal about literary life, and therefore I tell you as a friend, that a woman had better avoid it. If you succeed, you have a dangerous pre-eminence; if you fail, so many are mortified for you and through you,—mortified as one never can be about a man."

Charlie winced by way of reply, and Mrs. Walsh went on:

"I see you don't quite like and don't quite believe what I am saying; in direct contradiction to Mr. Goring's advice, too, how can I hope that mine will be taken? But I know that I am right in saying to a woman, Eschew that path if you would not drink of the waters of bitterness; and when

once you have smarted under the lash of public criticism you will know that I am right. Walter Goring is no friend to you in urging you on to this, and I shall tell him so." Mrs. Walsh spoke quite warmly for Mrs. Fellowes. She had no intention of suffering Mrs. Fellowes to come nearer to Walter Goring through that strange sympathy which fellow-craftship engenders, than she herself stood.

Charlie laughed. "I'm ashamed to say that I'm wafted about with every wind of doctrine—a proof that my heart is not in anything I undertake, I suppose ; you have quite crushed the dawning ambition ; now, will you come down and have some supper ? "

That night, before she went to bed, Mrs. Fellowes with the stealthy step of a thief, made her way into the library and tore her first story into very minute scraps. She did it with many a sigh and many a pang, for indeed she had thought the very best things that could have been thought of that, her earliest literary labour. But she supported and strengthened herself by the thought, "She shall never have the satisfaction of laughing at me with him, and of saying, 'I told you so.'"

She felt very much as if she had been cutting the

throats of some near relatives or dear friends, as she crept up to bed. When she reached her room, this giving up of her aim seemed to her like the abnegation of the only interest in life which could enable her to support through long years the eternal presence of Mrs. Fellowes, the little shawl, and Miss Dinah. By the time she was ready to lay her head on the pillow, she had determined that in future she would not make much ado about nothing, but that she would write and publish under a feigned name, and win much money and more fame, and—here her ideas became confused by the approach of slumber.

CHAPTER X.

A WALK TO THE COTTAGE.

WALTER GORING was over at the Hurst the following morning before the Fellowes's had finished breakfast. Mrs. Walsh had not made her appearance yet, and for once Charlie's opinion coincided with the opinions of her mother-in-law and Miss Dinah—that is to say, she felt glad that Mr. Goring should be disappointed, and considered his haste to see his beautiful widow friend almost indecent, and decidedly absurd. "I came over early," he explained, looking almost foolish as he offered the explanation, "because I thought that perhaps Mrs. Walsh and you would walk or drive out, or something of the sort, this morning, and I was afraid I should miss you."

"I don't know what Mrs. Walsh will want to do yet," Charlie replied; "if she's going to the cottage,

I think I shall leave her in your charge, Mr. Goring; I'm not very fond of standing about in damp unfurnished houses."

"You didn't seem to mind it the first time you went to the cottage," Miss Dinah remarked, considerably.

"It was a hard frost that day," Henry Fellowes said, rather touchily; "of course she didn't mind the damp when there was no damp to mind, Dinah?"

"Charlie embodies the idea of progress, to my mind," Frank put in, partly for the sake of soothing Miss Dinah, who was palpably ruffled by her brother's rebuke, and partly for the sake of doing away with the personal nature of the conversation by introducing an abstract proposition,—“she is always ready to let go an old liking, or old belief, or an old opinion for a new and a better one; are you not, Charlie?"

"Am I really? I didn't know I was so enlightened; but, as brothers are not generally addicted to flattering their sisters fulsomely, I will think you mean it, Frank."

"Well," old Mrs. Fellowes interposed, "in my young days we should *not* have thought it a compli-

ment to be told that we were always ready to let go our old likings and old beliefs."

"Probably you all started with better ones," Frank replied. "I'm sure *you* did, for instance."

"I only know that things are done and defended now that we should have shuddered at when I was young; but then I'm old, and had better hold my tongue. Mrs. Travers was saying only yesterday, 'Call *this* a high state of civilisation, talk of *this* as an enlightened and advanced age; it would be well, I'm sure, for one's morals if we could go back a few centuries.'"

"I would skip the Commonwealth, and pull up in the second Charles's time, if I had the management of the retrograde movement," Frank said; "and then I would be a courtier, and partake of those pure delights which Mrs. Travers so much regrets."

"I think I would go farther back, and be one of the Queen's Maries, before Darnley made things disagreeable," Charlie added.

"One of the Queen's Maries? Surely, under the delightful circumstances of freedom of choice which we are imagining, you would be the Queen herself, Mrs. Fellowes?" Walter Goring said, rising from

his chair as he spoke, and seating himself on a low ottoman that was near to Charlie.

“Of course she would, with the absolute command over the music and melodies of both Rizzio and Chastelard,” Frank was saying, when the door opened, and Mrs. Walsh came in, and marked the scene, and remembered clearly a day when Walter Goring had so bowed over her hand as to suggest a scene from Scottish History—the sweetest and most sentimental portion of it—to her husband, when she had been sketched for Mary Stuart, and Walter Goring for Chastelard.

“I am glad you have come down, Mrs. Walsh,” Mr. Fellowes said, when they had all greeted her; “they are talking the greatest nonsense.”

Mrs. Walsh looked at them indifferently. “They must return to sense then, now that I have come, for I want some very practical information. Which is the last train that I can return to town by to-day?”

“Return to town!” they all exclaimed. “Yes,” she said, coolly; “I have only come down to store my household goods and settle my two old servants in the cottage. I must have some place for them,

poor things ; but for my own part, I shall not settle anywhere for a year or two."

"Isn't this rather a sudden resolution ?" Walter Goring asked ; and for the life of him he could not help infusing a shade of reproach into his tone. He wanted Mrs. Walsh to believe that this announcement of a change in what he had thought to be her fixed intention was a disappointing thing to him—as disappointing as those Dead-Sea fruits which tempt the eye and turn to ashes on the lips.

"No," she replied, quietly ; "why should you think it so ? I always avoid explaining my intentions far ahead—it makes so much talk, and gives so much trouble."

She spoke with a great air of veracity ; in a cool sort of matter-of-course way that deceived every one of them—save Charlie. But Charlie read the riddle aright, and knew as well as Mrs. Walsh did that the resolution to go away at once was born in that moment of opening the door and coming upon the scene which has been described. Charlie had marked a momentary shade of trouble on the proud, beautiful face of her guest, and she thought "She's fearful of getting fond of him too soon—or she's annoyed with herself to find that she's fond

of him already ; one doesn't get touchy about one's mere friends."

About an hour after breakfast the party of four set off to walk to the cottage, Charlie having suddenly and obligingly waived all objection to damp and unfurnished houses. In fact, Mrs. Fellowes was feeling almost warmly disposed towards Mrs. Walsh by this time ; she thought it very good taste on the part of the widow to beat a timely retreat.

Until they were clear of the Hurst-grounds, the whole party kept together, but a small pool of water, and some such trifle as a cart-wheel ruck, at which the ladies paused, divided them when they reached the road. " This lane is like a morass for some little distance," Walter Goring said, turning to Mrs. Walsh ; " take my hand, and then you can walk along that strip of footpath by the hedge without slipping." Then she took his hand as he desired, and thus they were separated from the brother and sister. Frank marked his appreciation of Mr. Goring's manner of turning the position to account by a laugh, and the words " that was neatly done."

" What was neatly done ? " Charlie asked, rather

crossly. There was no beauty in the manœuvre in her eyes ; she was left to struggle along the strip of footpath and get her boots splashed without the slightest assistance, therefore the admirable nature of the precautions that were taken towards another woman's easy progress did not impress her favourably.

"Why, that last movement of Goring's," Frank replied, slackening his pace. "What a magnificent woman she is," he continued, in a low tone ; "an abbreviated, revised, and improved Cleopatra."

"Good gracious, Frank, what are your ideas of Cleopatra? She is as cold as ice ; she wouldn't let anything alter the expression of her face for the world when she has once arranged it for the day."

"I suppose you're rather put out because she is not going to remain and lighten our darkness?"

"I really care very little about it, Frank."

"Well, I don't think that Goring emulates your indifference—he's very hard hit."

"I don't believe it ; I think she likes him immensely, and that flatters him. But I don't believe she is at all the sort of woman he would fall in love with ; she's so statuesque, and he's so sympathetic."

"Your theory is faultless—nevertheless his prac-

"tice gives the lie to it," Frank said, laughing. "Come, Charlie, cheer up; your little yellow-haired friend stands no chance whatever against this one."

"Friend! she's no friend of mine, Frank; I only saw her that once out riding. I have told you about it, haven't I?"

"Fifteen times exactly," Frank replied.

"Well, perhaps I have, for she made a great impression upon me," Charlie replied, flushing; "at any rate she is not years and years older than Mr. Goring."

"But Mrs. Walsh is one of those whom 'age cannot wither or custom tame,' I should think."

"Age doesn't wither any one in these days, you know, Frank," Charlie said; and she tried to say it sarcastically.

"Go it, gentle woman; you would like me to look out for cracks in Mrs. Walsh's veneering."

"I never said she painted now, because I know she doesn't; but I do say, that if an old woman does not look withered, that she must varnish herself; now, Frank, don't laugh at me; if I am a little spiteful about Mrs. Walsh, it's because she disheartened me last night;" and Charlie really believed herself that this was the sole reason.

"How did she dishearten you?" her brother asked; and then Charlie told him about her destroyed hopes and MS., and he listened, and was sympathetic, and cheered her on to fresh attempts, until her fainting spirits rose and she felt ready to spoil any number of reams of paper without delay.

In the meantime, the pair in advance had not been conversing so freely and easily by any means. Walter Goring was not at all certain how he stood with the widow. More than this, he was not at all certain how he desired to stand with her. He had been accustomed for so many years to regard her as something set apart and utterly unattainable; and now, by a violent throe of nature, her position was altered, and he did not know how to reconcile himself to it, even in his own heart, much less to adapt himself to it outwardly. For years there had existed between these two people a cordiality and regard so open, warm, and (on his part) demonstrative, that any cessation from it must of necessity be very painful. But, on the other hand, a continuance of it might be prejudicial to her, and to him also. The union had been shared in and sanctioned by her husband; it had all been fair and above-board; in the blameless sense of the phrase, she

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had been more than kind to him, though less than kin. He was bound to her by a hundred associations—bound to her especially by that not-to-be-broken chain of feeling, that she liked him better, perhaps, than she did any one else. But he was far from feeling sure that he was in love with her, and equally far from imagining her to be in love with him. His sensations about her were of precisely the same nature as they had been when Ralph Walsh was alive. Whether hers had developed into anything more tender may not be known yet.

“What makes you rush away to-day?” he began as soon as the party divided in the manner indicated above; “it was like a blow in the chest to me when you said you were going.”

“I shall come back again sometime or other, I suppose,” she answered, “but at present I feel too restless to make a settled home anywhere; you *didn't* imagine that I was going to put myself down at Deneham at once, did you?”

“I did, indeed—and now I'm plunged in cold water; don't expect me to applaud your resolve after having indulged myself with such different anticipations for some time.”

He spoke almost complainingly. It did seem to

him rather heartless of her to go away before he had come to any determination respecting what his feelings were or might be about her.

"It is better that I should go," she said, in a low tone.

"Of course it is, if it seems good to you." Almost involuntarily he was taking an aggrieved tone.

"It is far better that I should go," she repeated, resolutely; "so many things that seemed firmly fixed have been thrown into new forms by Ralph's death, that I had better not attempt to settle down and take up my old life again until I have had time to think about things as they are, and to get accustomed to them."

"What single thing is thrown into new form?" he asked.

"O, several things!"

"Name one," he persisted.

"Well, my relations with people," she said, hesitatingly.

"It's your own fault if you suffer them to be altered," he replied, putting his hands in his pocket, and looking straight away at the landscape in front of them.

“It is inevitable that they should be altered.”

“Why,” he looked down at her now as she walked along by his side. “Why, if you—” the sight of her deep mourning checked him in whatever he had been going to say, and he added after a moment’s pause: “Perhaps you are right; you always are right—my goddess.” He had never called her that since her husband’s death, and the tone in which he said it now made her tremble for a moment. Then the old phrase seemed to put her more on her old terms with him, for she looked at him very kindly, and said:

“Will you promise not to make a shadow of mistake about something I am going to say to you?”

“Could I ever be so blind or besotted as to make mistakes about *you*?”

“I don’t know. I hope not, I heartily hope not; I think our friendship is founded on a rock; but this is a point on which you might resent interference from your nearest and dearest relatives even; I want to speak to you about that daughter of your uncle’s, and Mrs. Fellowes?”

“My cousin Daisy, and Mrs. Fellowes! What of them?”

"Don't call her your cousin, Walter. I cannot bear to think of her as nearly connected with you in any way. I have heard a rumour of your being sufficiently attracted by her to think of making her your wife; this cannot be true."

"Certainly not," he replied, laughing; "but for all that, you must not underrate the Daisy; she will be a person of consequence."

"How?"

"I can only tell you a portion of the case, and you must respect my confidence religiously; she will be the mistress of Goring Place in her own right, if a certain condition, which I shall not confide to you, remains unfulfilled when she is twenty-one."

"And that condition,"—Mrs. Walsh had grown very pale, and she seemed to have a slight difficulty in speaking, her voice was so very faint and low,—"and that condition is—that you marry her."

"I have told you all I can tell you," he replied, gently; and she thought she had never seen him look so handsome, so manly, so capable of bearing the utmost reverses, as he did now, when speaking of his probable resignation of the great estate into which he had so recently come. "And what about

Mrs. Fellowes?" he asked; "you had something to say to me about her too."

"It is this. She is surrounded by Argus eyes, and she is very frank and unguarded. You see I do her all justice; do not let that appear in your manner to her which may possibly mislead people and get her lightly spoken of."

"Am I likely to behave like such a scoundrel?" he asked, coldly.

"Walter, I begged you not to misunderstand me."

"Nor will I—forgive me," he said, imploringly. He was farther than ever from knowing which of these three women he regarded the most warmly, but unquestionably Mrs. Walsh's watchful interest was far from unpleasant to him just now.

"Your manner is softer, more devotional and flattering than she has ever been accustomed to; it is entirely for her sake that I speak. I am not afraid for you."

"That's very good of you," he said, half laughing.

"But those semi-facetious, semi-sentimental conversations—imagining yourselves to be all sorts of odious bygone people, and things of that sort—

are imprudent and foolish; she was always a dreadful flirt, too, as Miss St. John; there is no particular credit in fanning the smouldering embers of a sort of romance which she has brought to bear on many men before she knew you."

"Believe me, I have no desire to do anything of the sort, or to read any passages from the back numbers of her life," he said, indifferently; but he thought "how hardly women handle each other, to be sure—when there is nothing to be gained by it either."

Mrs. Walsh was inexorable in her resolve to go back to Town this same day; therefore when they had looked at the cottage, and the new mistress had settled with some village dame of decent repute to remain in charge of it until the two old servants of whom she had made mention should arrive,—when these things had been done it was time to go back to the Hurst and prepare for the start. They formed an unbroken company all the way home, so there was no further confidential converse between Walter and Mrs. Walsh. But when he was putting her into the carriage that was to take her away to the station, he bent forward under pretence of adjusting some of her wraps and travelling-bags,

and as he did so he touched her hand with his lips. She did not withdraw it; on the contrary, it seemed to him that his pressure was returned. He looked up at her suddenly, and his eyes glowed with an admiration which he could not subdue as he whispered, "I shall see you soon—good-bye for a short time though."

She did not speak, but she held her hand out to him and smiled her own smile—the smile that said so much more than her lips ever did—upon him. Then he drew back, and the carriage drove off, and she looking through the window saw him standing bare-headed watching her. "I am quite right to leave," she said to herself, "for several reasons—he might come to a conclusion too soon if I stayed, or he might never come to one at all if he saw much of me." Then she took herself to task for suffering such thoughts to grow so soon after her husband's death: and then forgave herself on the plea that she "had known Walter's value so long and thoroughly."

He meanwhile had gone back in to the library to smoke a cigar with Frank. Charlie had received a pressing invitation from her brother to retire to that haunt with them, and save them from so

beclouding their faculties at that early hour, but she had excused herself. Why, she scarcely knew.

Young Mrs. Fellowes was in truth feeling put out in a vague, unsatisfactory sort of way. Her day was broken in upon and destroyed through the untoward departure of her guest; but perhaps she might have been resigned to that, had an incident of that departure not been recounted to her by Miss Dinah. "I was up at the staircase window," that ruthless virgin said to her composedly, "when Mr. Goring handed Mrs. Walsh into the carriage; I'm sure—heartless as it may seem—I hope he is engaged to her, for the way he kissed her hand—and she never saying a word against it—was unblushing, if he isn't."

"I really can't pretend to care whether Mr. Goring kissed her hand or not," Charlie replied.

"No, my dear. You needn't 'pretend,'" old Mrs. Fellowes struck in with the level look over the spectacles. "Well: all I say is, give me old times and old manners; in my young day a modest woman behaved herself as such."

"Please remember that I didn't stand sponsor for Mrs. Walsh," Charlie cried; she was sorry, and

sick, and tired of it all ; a sudden and unaccountable accession of weariness had set in ; everybody's future looked so much brighter than her own.

CHAPTER XI.

FRESH RESOLUTIONS.

WHEN Walter Goring went into the library after seeing Mrs. Walsh off, he found Frank St. John leaning on his sister's writing-table making a hasty sketch. "Look here," he exclaimed, "how's that?" and Walter looked and saw a rough but bold and perfect likeness of Mrs. Walsh.

"It's very good,—it's admirable, in fact."

Frank sat down and gave it a few more touches.

"I'll make something of it, if I can only come across another face that I want ; I got an idea from an attitude and expression of Mrs. Walsh's this morning, that if I can only carry it out will be—" he stopped, and did not say what it would be, but began to whistle softly in a well-pleased manner as he sketched in another figure. Mr. Goring leant over his chair watching his work.

"You don't mean that you will give us another version of the bowl-and-dagger business if you can only find a face fair enough for Rosamond's, do you? Poor Ralph took her for his model of Eleanor only two years ago."

"Nothing so hackneyed; no—how about this study though? I wish she had stayed another day; I would have made another of her."

"I tell you I think it admirable," Walter Goring replied. "But how do you propose turning it to account?" he added, lounging over to a couch, and from thence lazily watching Frank through the smoke of his cigar.

"I'll paint that scene from Elaine where Guinevere plays the imperial vixen about the diamonds; don't you remember?"

Goring nodded:

"—hers, not mine—

Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,

Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—

She shall not have them.'

Do you mean those lines?"

"Yes; and I'll paint Mrs. Walsh in the act of pitching the diamonds into the river as Elaine floats past dead. I'm in earnest about this; I can make something of a picture of it: she's inspired me."

"I'm delighted to hear it; she's inspired a good many men," Walter Goring said; then he added, laughing, "you wouldn't make a bad Lancelot yourself, St. John, if you did yourself justice."

"I won't rely upon myself; I'll be off to town to-morrow, and look out for a Lancelot and an Elaine in the ranks of the regular models. By Jove! I'm very glad I am out of the service. I shall take up painting as a profession, and work at it." He went on drawing vigorously the whole time he was speaking.

"But you can't get the whole thing in effectively in one picture," Walter Goring urged; "divide your canvas, and have one view of the barge with the dead body of the 'Lily Maid' upon it, and another of the balcony with the queen and the knight?"

"Not a bit of it. See," and Frank rose up and went over to show his companion the sketch he had made. "I shall have a strong light falling across Guinevere's face down on to the upturned one of the girl; Lancelot is a minor consideration in this scene—he plays rather a pitiful part; all the passion and interest is with the women."

There was a vigour, a grace, and a suggestiveness

about this first rough, hurried study which fully justified Frank's expectations of "making something fine of it." Walter Goring felt that there was this, and he said cordially, as he handed the paper back to the artist,—

"If you really mean work, and are going back to town, I shall be glad to introduce you to a number of men who will be happy to help you if they can."

"Mean work? I mean it, and no mistake," Frank replied, "and I shall be much obliged to you for the introductions."

"You will not easily get a face fair enough and strong enough for Elaine; your sister, Mrs. Fellows, has the expression of mingled softness and strength which we suppose to have been the characteristics of the girl who died of love, but ——"

"She hasn't the fair beauty," Frank interrupted; "no, to match the Guinevere will be my difficulty."

"And I doubt your matching her among the regular models; it's a certain condition of being a regular model that a something which Elaine must possess should have vanished."

"If I fail in finding an Elaine, my whole picture will go to smash," Frank said, rather dejectedly.

“My dear fellow! couldn’t you, in that case, turn that study you have made of Mrs. Walsh to account in some other way? Anna Boleyn dashing the portrait of Henry to pieces when she finds Jane Seymour looking at it, or Cassandra asking of the heavens where Troy’s hope, Hector, is? or something of that sort.”

“No,” Frank said, holding his sketch away from him, in order to judge of the effect afresh: “if I can’t carry this out for years for want of that special face, I will not destroy the idea by distorting it; if Charlie had the colouring, she would do; but she has only the expression, and I want a touch of truth in each detail.”

“Shall you get to work on this before you bring out your book?” Walter Goring asked.

“Yes; I’ll leave Charlie to put that in order, and I’ll send the proofs to her; she likes doing anything for me, and it will be good practice for her. I shall not suffer anything to interfere with this if I can only find ——” Again he paused, and began whistling thoughtfully, and Walter Goring suggested,—

“An Elaine and a Lancelot?”

“Yes,” he replied; “by Jove! if I can do that,

I'll make my name with this picture ; it paints itself as I think about it."

"Don't be off before Christmas, at any rate," Walter Goring urged.

"Christmas won't be a remarkably hilarious season in this house, I'm afraid," Frank replied, shaking his head ; "poor Fellowes's affairs are in an awful mess—of that there's no doubt; he even spoke to me to-day about letting The Hurst and the land, and getting 'something to do' himself, poor fellow. I wish he would have the pluck to tell my sister; but he won't, and I have no right to interfere."

"That marriage was a bitter bad business," Walter Goring exclaimed, starting up as he spoke, and commencing to walk up and down the room.

"As it has turned out," Frank replied, quietly, going over to the fireplace and lighting his cigar.

"In any event, there is something incongruous in it, according to my idea."

"I don't agree with you," Frank said ; "at any rate, now that he's under a cloud, isn't exactly the time I should select for finding out all that is not

most auspicious in the affair. Fellowes is worth a hundred of the white-livered hound who married my other sister. I only wish I could get him to believe that he feels the business more acutely than Charlie will; he fears that she's going to be 'alienated,' and all sorts of extraordinary things; she's much too good a girl."

"In fact, good fellow as he is, his wife is beyond him; beyond him! she's as far above him as the stars in heaven," Walter Goring said; and for this panegyric on his pet sister Frank had no words of reproof. Cordially as he liked, and heartily as he sympathised with his brother-in-law, he yet felt that there was much truth in Walter Goring's estimate of the relative altitudes of husband and wife.

In the meantime Charlie was being tested. After Mrs. Walsh's departure, she had, as has been seen, been seized upon by Miss Dinah, and compelled to listen to the tale of how tenderly Mr. Goring had taken leave of the widow. Then old Mrs. Fellowes had delivered a short homily on the subject, and Charlie had resented the idea of being interested in, or responsible for, Mrs. Walsh's divergence from the path of propriety. Then she had sought for

her husband, and entreated him to take her out for a ride.

"It will be dark soon," he said.

"Never mind; let us go out till it is dark; I'm unsettled to-day, and I should like a canter on old Major."

So old Major was had round, and she went out with her husband on horseback for the first time since their marriage.

Now it may be remembered that at Brighton she had been contented with the old brown horse, and beautifully resigned to riding him, since nothing better was to be had. But now circumstances were much altered. Then she had been Miss St. John: now she was, as she thought, the wife of a rich man, who could give her a better horse if he chose. She found many faults with old Major before she had been on his back ten minutes.

"How he pokes his head forward," she began. "Just hold him up a bit; take him more on the curb, so."

"Then he flags, if he doesn't stop outright, Harry."

"Frank took it out of him yesterday," Mr. Fellowes explained.

“Frank rode him round the farm, didn’t he?”

“Yes, and put him at everything he could.”

“High-couraged horse to be tried with that. Well, Harry, *is* he going to sleep under me or not?”

“Touch him up; you used to find he took you along all right at Brighton.”

“That is to say, as he never did anything but carry me, he managed to get up a canter on the downs; he is sweet-tempered, though; I never knew a horse take the whip so kindly; look here.” She illustrated her remark by cutting the Major over the near shoulder, an attention which he acknowledged by whisking his tail, and breaking into a calm canter.

“He’s going very well now,” Mr. Fellowes remarked.

“It’s just a pace I hate,” Charlie replied, frowning a little; “he’s so dull.”

“He’s been a first-rate horse in his time.”

“His time must be long past, that’s all I can say, Harry. I do wish you would get me a young horse, dear—one that I could ride with pleasure; will you?”

He almost gulped as he answered,

“I cannot at present, my darling.” He felt that it was a sore task to refuse her this—the first favour she had asked of him since their marriage, more especially as a new riding-horse had been amongst the many things he had promised her in the days of their engagement.

She pulled up and put her hand to her side. “This old beast bores forward so, that I seem to be going over his head every minute, Harry; I must make up my mind, I suppose, to give my habit up to the moths, for if I can’t have anything better, I will never ride the Major again.”

She, too, remembered that this was the first favour she had asked at her husband’s hands. The first—and he refused it. Her words stung him terribly. He thought that he would give her a hint—just a little hint—that he was well off then when he married her. But we all know how difficult it is to pause on the warning brink of either a painful or pleasant communication.

“My darling, I would give you anything in the world, if I only had it to give; I didn’t mean to tell you yet, Charlie. I hoped—that is, I thought—well, the long and the short of it is, that I’m a ruined man through—through——”

"No fault of your own, I'm *sure*," she cried, drawing her horse nearer to his now, as he had done the day he asked her to be his wife ; "ruined, my dear husband, and you have kept it all from me—you wouldn't even let me share your sorrow, while I have been selfish as usual—bothering about my own pleasures."

She bent over and laid her hand on his, and he felt his burden lightened at once. He had so dreaded the effects of this communication upon her. He had so writhed under the fear that when it was made she might drift away even further from him. In fact, he had so misunderstood her, that the relief he felt at this moment was indescribable.

"God bless you, Charlie, God bless you, my pet," he said, hoarsely, as she pressed her hand into his. There was a wealth of promise in her touch, it seemed to assure him of her capability of standing so much, and never finding it hard ; she looked such a bright, brave woman as she leant towards him, and seemed to pledge herself anew to partizanship with him in everything. "I am so much happier than I have been for weeks," he added, presently, as he regained command over his voice.

"I'm in such a rage with myself for having been

so blind for weeks," she cried. "What was the use of me when I didn't find out your trouble? but you are not going to be beaten down by it? no; are you, Harry?"

"My trouble is more for you than myself," he said, with a sob in his voice and a knot in his throat—"to have brought you into it—to have brought you from a good home."

"Where I was simply wretched," she interrupted; "but don't you think I feel that I am the bitterest drop in your cup, whatever it may be; don't you think that I don't know that you would never have let trouble or care or annoyance of any sort come near me if you could have helped it? I *do* know it. Show me that you believe I know it, by letting me see that you will be happier in having me with you whatever is coming, than you would have been alone."

She spoke very earnestly, but without strain, or tears, or other token of suppressed feeling. With all her faults she was not a lachrymose woman; when she sought to cheer a man she neither sighed nor sobbed at him; she spoke out cheerily and heartily, as if she knew that she was speaking of a very solemn thing, but not at all as if she thought

it the saddest thing that could have befallen her. Her husband nearly worshipped her as he rode along by her side. Her bright sympathy, her loving sincerity, were incomprehensible things to him, coming as they did immediately after the display of pettish dissatisfaction with the Major.

"You don't know all the misery it may entail upon us yet, my darling," he said, seriously. Then he told her the whole story as they rode on and the day darkened. But there was more light on his face and in his soul than there had been for many a day, when he had poured the whole story out and made his wife his confidante.

"I can feel for your sorrow at leaving The Hurst, if we are obliged to leave it, dear," she said, when he had finished; and even as she spoke her heart gave a little glad bound at the idea of being by this means entirely free from the atmosphere of his mother and sister; "but still, think how much pleasanter it will be for you to go away with me than if you had been obliged to go alone."

"Charlie—my pet—I hardly know whether I'm justified in feeling the happiness I do in having married you and got you into this scrape."

"I should rather think that you were justified,"

she replied, laughing; then she added more seriously, "Come, Harry, I know it's a great blow—a bad blow—don't think me stupid and incapable of appreciating the full extent of your misfortune, dear; but I can't pretend to feel crushed by it; surely between us we can keep the wolf from the door, and the striving to do so will give us plenty to do and think about. Now let us have a good sharp gallop to settle our emotions and give us an appetite for dinner. Does Frank know of all this?"

"Yes, Charlie."

"And he has never hinted a word of it to me; well, you all thought me a more cowardly woman than I am, that is all I can say. Life's quite as bright to me as it was an hour ago, and I flatter myself that it is a little brighter to you, sir. Poor boy; it must be awful for a man to fear that his wife will break down and be a burdensome nuisance just as he needs her to be the helpmate he took her for."

About half an hour after this they reached The Hurst, and young Mrs. Fellowes on being lifted from her horse by her once more beaming husband, ran into the house and into the library to look for her brother. "Look here, Charlie," he commenced

as soon as he saw her, "I have made a study for a picture I'm going to astonish the world with in May," and he showed his sketch and told her its subject. "I'm off to Town to-morrow to work at it while my interest is young and vigorous," he continued, laughing; "besides, I want to find an Elaine."

"Stay over Christmas-day."

"Temptress, avaunt! no, I will sit upon the yellow sands and eat lotos no longer; men must work."

"I won't tempt you to idleness, trust me; but I wanted your help for a few days; women must work too. Harry has told me all about this abominable banking business. I want to sketch out a novel and give it to you to strengthen weak places in the framework; will you help me?"

"My dearest Charlie, with all my heart, but I fancy you would do this whole thing better by yourself; there's something patchy, according to my ideas, about the sort of thing you suggest."

The fact was, well inclined as Frank was to help his sister, he was very anxious to get to work at once on his own picture. Nevertheless, weak as

the main-spring of it might have been, the advice in itself was good.

“Well—I shall try without you then, Frank.”

“Yes, do—and if you need help get Goring to help you; he’s a clever fellow; he says there is more spirit in that composition of mine than in anything he has come across for a long time.”

“He must be a clever fellow, indeed,” she replied, laughing, and holding up her face to kiss her brother at the same time. “I’m delighted now that Mrs. Walsh, with her ‘imperial moulded form and beauty such as never woman wore,’ did come down—the sight of her has set you going. Now I must get ready for dinner, or my esteemed mother-in-law will either rate me directly, or reproach me by not eating anything herself.”

Then she went up-stairs, and told her husband about Frank’s picture, forcing Henry Fellowes to feel that there were many things in life still in which his wife took a bright interest, and expected him to take one also. This evidence of “her pluck,” as he called it, appealed to him more strongly than any amount of tearful tenderness could have done. He felt that she would be as trusty a comrade as any man could have been in

fighting the battle of life, and he no longer regretted the words he had spoken under the trees through which the sunbeams fell—on the night when they had met Walter and Daisy Goring.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRESCOTTS AS GUESTS AT THE HURST.

FRANK ST. JOHN carried his design of going away the following day into execution. His sister was very sorry to lose him—to miss his bright companionship, and that sense of having some one near her who was sure to be set in the same key as herself, which she had had while he remained. Nevertheless she was not sorry to be entirely free from all temptation to idleness; she wanted to work—and she no longer lacked the incentive.

Almost immediately after Frank's departure, the Prescotts announced themselves as likely to come to The Hurst on or before New Year's Day. "We will give them the best welcome we can, but I had hoped to have had them down here in very different style," Henry Fellowes said rather moodily as he

sat twisting the letter his wife had handed him to read—apprising them of the visit.

“Will their coming make any material difference to you in any way?” she asked.

“No, of course not; Prescott has had nothing to do with this business.”

“Then, my dear Harry, don’t let the thought of them afflict you in any way; I know you would like to have made an honourable fuss about any of my people, but I know Robert Prescott so well, and he is not exactly the man I could have wished you to waste your substance upon even if it were yours to waste; as it is, we’ll give him of our best, dear; and if he isn’t pleased, he can go away, you know.”

“What will he think when he finds I am obliged to get out of this after having just brought you into it?”

She moved her head impatiently. “Think! who cares what he thinks. I can tell you, though,” she continued, laughing, “he’ll think it a fair opportunity for smoothing himself down on account of his superior prudence, and he’ll look out sharply to see if he can make anything by the matter.”

“And you will have to hear from him that you

have done a foolish thing, Charlie," her husband said, tenderly.

"That I have had to hear so many times—oh, so many times," she replied; "I never believed him, and I shall believe him less than ever now, if you're satisfied with me."

"Satisfied with you!" there was a world of loving confidence in the way he echoed her words. Her face flushed, for in her own heart she held herself to be scarcely worthy of such absolute belief.

"At any rate," she continued hurriedly, "I am more than satisfied with my lot, Harry; this isn't a bit of feeble romance, remember: whatever comes I am better off than I was before you knew me—for now I am everything to some one, before I was nothing."

"Charlie: you don't know even yet what you are to me—how much more precious you grow each moment." He went over and bent his head down upon her shoulders and whispered, "I shall bless my ruin, since it has brought me the full knowledge that my wife loves me."

A tide of recollections, of doubts, of fears, or the dread of loneliness, swept over her. But she

checked all outward display of it, and answered him without a trace of trembling in her tone.

“I don’t think that I shall be easily put down, Harry, whatsoever comes. I am rather like a cork;” then she laughed and added, “I haven’t been tried yet, but I believe I am what you call ‘game;’ like Frank. Look at Frank, doesn’t he bear his misfortunes nobly?” she added, enthusiastically, quite forgetting that the gentleman thus honourably mentioned did not regard what had lately befallen him in the light of a misfortune at all.

But though she discussed their anticipated advent thus brightly and carelessly with her husband, the Prescotts hung over her like a cloud. It made her head ache to think of how Robert Prescott’s lip would lengthen when he had screwed some of the details out of poor dejected Henry Fellowes. “He’ll drop six-and-eightpenny sentiments as if they were pearls; and then I shall be insolent,” she thought. “Oh, dear! Lord deliver me from much of Robert Prescott; and Ellen—don’t I know exactly the sort of limp lunatic I shall feel after Ellen has let fall a dozen of her Robert Prescottisms upon me?”

I think that we must all be acquainted with some

woman whose mission on earth it is to be her husband's wife—only this and nothing more. From a purely intellectual, or purely social point of view, the continuance of the species is not to be desired: but from the purely moral point of view this type of woman is unassailable. Her husband's people are her people, and his God is her God—whether she adores the man himself from the bottom of her soul is an open question. Indeed, the women who go into blind abject allegiance in this way, seldom have any souls from the bottom of which they can adore. They are capable of carrying their packs—and of seeming to adjust them gracefully—and what more can men who require so much care for?

Mrs. Prescott was one of these women. She had the characteristic of her order strongly marked; her husband was her sole book of reference, and she quoted him hugely. This she did, not in the manner of one who seeks to strengthen the estimate of her own propounded opinions and ideas by adducing corroborative sentiments from an outsider in any disputed case; but she pushed her husband's axioms on all subjects to the front, and then took up a stolid position behind them as it were. Not

enlarging upon them in any way—she was too unimaginative to alter the text of this holy gospel; but just reiterating them until the soundest of them became abominations in the ears of her hearers.

The rumour of the mesh of miserable difficulties in which Mr. Fellowes was entangled had reached Mr. Prescott, though it had not been officially communicated to him by the unlucky gentleman. The prosperous lawyer had been on the look-out for a country-house with good grounds for some time, and it occurred to him now that it would be a profitable investment of his time to go down and see The Hurst. Should the need for the sale of it be as great as he believed, why, he asked himself, should he not purchase the place, and perchance drive a good bargain, as well as a stranger? So the Prescotts announced themselves for New Year's Day, as has been said, and all the inhabitants of The Hurst were excited by the announcement, according to their respective degrees.

The whole family came, as Mrs. Prescott was a fond mother after that pattern which always desires to have her children within hail should a sudden wish to see one of them arise. She never took any

trouble about them ; in fact, she never took any trouble about anything save the fit of her dresses, and this, not because she was a specially vain or a specially well-dressed woman, but because she had been imbued with the notion that " they ought to fit " at school. Consequently she held fast to that notion just as she kept the commandments, and did her duty in that house in Bayswater whither Providence, together with Mr. Prescott, had called her. But though she never took any trouble about her children, she made a point of telling people, " I like to have them with me everywhere—a mother should, I think, don't you ? " And the speech was spotless, and won Mrs. Prescott a seat in a high place in the matron-imagined maternal Paradise.

Mr. Fellowes had received them very cordially. It was the nature of the man to be hospitable, and happy to see every one who came to his house. Moreover, he thought high things of the Prescotts, partly because Robert Prescott was what he called " a hard-headed man," and partly because he was the husband of Charlie's sister. " Why, I owe you to him, don't I ? " the good-natured grateful fellow said to Charlie, snatching a moment from his exuberant welcome of his guests to tell her so. To which

Charlie replied, "Of course it's a tremendous debt, dear; but don't pay it by letting Robert Prescott badger you about your own business—he'll try it on, I feel convinced." The old antagonistic spirit, exorcised apparently by her intense sympathy with her husband, rose up at sight of the man who had the galling art of saying the most truthful things in such a way that she could but cavil at them. Besides, he had greeted her with the words, "Really, Charlotte, you look surprisingly well." What wonder that she was very much on her defence against any possible interference with herself or her husband.

The morning after their arrival, Mr. Fellowes and Mr. Prescott went out for a ride round the farm. The round-backed lawyer was not a very finished equestrian. While he was in the saddle he felt a lesser man than Fellowes. The uncertainty of life was very much before him as he rode along on an old hunter, "who," his host assured him, "would make nothing of popping over that hurdle or that hedge," pointing out those objects as he spoke to Mr. Prescott, who felt dubious as to what the result would be should the horse "pop over," as it was upon the cards he might do, without consulting his

rider's wishes. Unwillingly, he took a military seat, and his teeth chattered, not so much with fear as with the jolting, whenever they got out of a walk. He knew, too, that his hat had settled farther back upon his head than was becoming, and that there was a goodly portion of both his legs visible to the eyes of the vulgar, who made ribald jokes to one another on the subject as he passed along. Nor could he remedy these defects, uncomfortably conscious as he was of them. For the old hunter had a habit of pulling, and Mr. Prescott had a dark foreboding. Did he relax his fervent hold with both hands on the reins for a single instant, he felt he would be borne with velocity over the very hedgy and ditchy landscape, to the downfall of his dignity and the detriment of his person. "He doesn't seem to be carrying you well—you don't ride easy, do you?" Henry Fellowes asked at last, becoming suddenly conscious of Mr. Prescott's face being of a purple hue from over-exertion.

"He has nearly twitched my arms out of their sockets," that unhappy gentleman answered.

"Ah! give him his head a bit," the other one said, cheerfully; and Mr. Prescott thought, "give a brute like this his head, indeed—not if I can help it."

“You’ll get used to his way after a time or two,” the master of the horse went on.

“Never!” Mr. Prescott thought, emphatically; and just then they rode through a gate into a wide expanse of meadow, and the old hunter gave a small bound expressive of satisfaction at finding himself on spring elastic turf. One of Mr. Prescott’s feet came out of the stirrup, and the lawyer had to scramble wildly about in his steed’s mane before he could steady himself and get his foot in again. “I never saw such an extraordinary horse in my life,” he said, touchily. “What did he do, then?” “I really fancy—I may be mistaken—but I can’t help thinking, Fellowes, that he has got the meagrim, don’t you call it?”

Fellowes laughed. “You needn’t be afraid of that at this time of year: look here, if you have no objection, we will just go over to Goring Place. I want to ask Goring to come and dine with us.”

“Thank Heaven!” Mr. Prescott thought, as he gave a blindly eager assent. He thought that Goring Place must be nearer to them now than The Hurst, and that he would thus sooner gain a temporary relief.

"Then we'll just cut across here, and over the ditch at the bottom; that takes us on to Goring's land—it's a short cut," Henry Fellowes said, pointing down the meadow as he spoke; and suiting the action to the word, he went off at a sharp canter, before his companion could utter a word of remonstrance. It never occurred to him that Mr. Prescott was in difficulty, far less that he was in mortal terror. It was apparent enough that he was not handling the horse well, but that was between his conscience and the old brown hunter; and Mr. Fellowes knew the old brown hunter too well to dread his taking a mean advantage.

Mr. Prescott had no time to utter a word of remonstrance, for the instant the brown horse saw his fellow start, he started too, at a steady stride that took away Mr. Prescott's breath, and brought him, he felt, with hideous speed along to that yawning ditch at the bottom which Mr. Fellowes had indicated so ruthlessly. His legs flapped feebly against the saddle—he was bitterly bumped—he would have given a year's income to feel sure that if he threw himself off he wouldn't hurt himself. But the old horse saved him the trouble of coming to a decision on this point, by taking the ditch like

a bird, and dropping Mr. Prescott in the middle of it.

"Why, what did he do?" Henry Fellowes asked, when he had dragged Mr. Prescott out of the ditch, and assisted that gentleman in removing a little of the black mud and green slime from his hair and whiskers.

"Do!" the other replied, with a snarl, "why, he 'did' something with his back and legs at the same moment that gave me a most fearful twist; he's the most diabolical horse I was ever on in my life."

"What's to be done?—you can't walk home in this state."

"I'll not trust myself upon that brown brute again. I'm the father of a family, and shouldn't be justified in doing it; married men have no right to jeopardise their lives or fortunes." Now that he was safe on the ground again, he could no longer resist administering a veiled rebuke to the man by whose side he had felt so helpless a thing for the last hour.

"Well, what's to be done?" Henry Fellowes repeated. "I'd change horses, but this bay mare, though she's gentle as a lamb, might lark off with you; come, get on, try the old horse again."

"No," Mr. Prescott replied. "I might take cold, you see; I'll walk home, if you'll point out the way; but you'll excuse my leading the horse—I don't like his eye."

"Very well," Henry Fellowes said, laughing; "all right, old fellow. Go out through that gate on the left, and then keep along the lane; you'll soon see The Hurst. I'll just go on to Goring and ask him to dinner."

"He'll go over and laugh at the mischief his brute of a horse has done, with that young idiot who is always foisting his immoral twaddle on the public," Mr. Prescott thought, as he walked away with faltering, uncertain steps. He was not broken, but he was most sorely bruised, and all the tendons of his legs were strained in consequence of his having tried to keep his feet down in stirrups which he had insisted on having left much too long for him. Moreover, he was not quite certain as to his nearest path to The Hurst, and he was quite certain that Charlie would laugh when she saw him. "She'll be sending an account of it to that puppy, her brother, and he will be making a caricature of it," he thought, angrily, as he walked along, dripping.

The sisters meanwhile had been getting on pleasantly enough. They had not met since Charlie's wedding-day, and Ellen had much to ask relative to the way in which divers dresses had worn. "There's that velvet," she had said, "have you ever had it on?"

"No," Charlie replied; "the dinner-parties I have been to as yet haven't been up to that mark; I've been out in simplicity and silks. I reserve that velvet to come down upon them with a crusher just as they think my wedding outfit is exhausted."

"Robert says you won't want that velvet now."

"How wonderfully good of Robert."

"And I would take it off your hands, Charlie."

"How wonderfully good of you, dear; but, on the whole, I prefer keeping it on my hands."

"Robert says that, under these sad circumstances, people would talk if you dressed too richly; he said he was sure you wouldn't wish to do it, and I said, oh! no."

"How nicely Ella's hair grows; there is quite a ruddy tinge in it now—it's ever so much richer in colour than it was before," Charlie said, carelessly.

"Yes, it is—but about that dress, dear Charlie?"

I can't bear to think of your being burdened with it; do you know, too, that Robert is quite willing to take The Hurst off your hands?"

"What?" Charlie asked, sharply.

"Well, he says that as he has long wanted a country-house, he may as well take this as any other, if——"

"He can get it," Charlie interrupted, hastily; "let us leave business topics to the men, at any rate, Ellen."

"Yes, of course. What do you think of doing when you leave The Hurst?"

"I haven't given my mind to the subject yet."

"But Robert says that you ought to think—that it's quite time for you to think; you're *much* worse off than if you had never married, Charlie." Ellen grew quite impressive as she said this—"supposing you should have a family?"

"I won't trouble you as to their maintenance, at any rate," Charlie said, quickly; "but let us speak of pleasanter possibilities, please. You know what a good draftsman Frank is—he is going to do something with his talent that will make us all very proud of him." Then she told Ellen about the picture for which an Elaine was wanted, and Ellen

asked "if he couldn't make an Elaine out of his own head, as he was so clever?" and thought rather poorly of him when she heard that he distrusted his own power of doing so.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO OFFERS.

WHEN Henry Fellowes reached home that day after inviting Mr. Goring to come over and dine with him, he had the important eager look on his face of one who is the bearer of exciting intelligence. "Goring's coming, Charlie," he said, hurriedly entering the room where he learnt that his wife would be found, "but he's quite thrown out of gear by a letter he has had."

"About what?" Charlie asked; then, before he could answer, she went on laughingly, "and so is Robert Prescott thrown out of gear. He came home about half-an-hour ago looking a more wretched object than usual; he says you would go steeple-chasing over land he didn't know! that's a story, of course; but what did you do, Harry?"

“Tried to take him across the little ditch on to Goring’s land, that’s all,” Henry Fellowes replied contemptuously. “I never saw such a fellow in my life: he came out of the saddle for nothing, and then he nearly cried.”

“Poor discomfited, found-out humbug. I knew all along that he didn’t know a horse’s head from its tail; but you should have heard him talk, Harry, to understand the bliss I feel in knowing he has had an ignominious tumble. What about Mr. Goring, though?”

“Why, he has had a letter from the governess or duenna or whatever she is at Brighton; his cousin has cut.”

“What has she cut?” Charlie asked, wonderingly.

“Her home—her school—whatever it was; she’s gone off; the old lady she was with, thought she was gone to Goring Place, but Goring’s heard nothing of her, and he’s in an awful way.”

“I suppose he is very fond of her,” Charlie said, gravely.

“Whether he is fond of her or not, he’s responsible for her in a measure. I never saw a man so cut up as he is about it. He has telegraphed to

Clark, his lawyer, and sent him off to Brighton to get a clue if possible to her whereabouts."

"How *can* she cause him such trouble? what a little brute she must be," Charlie exclaimed, vehemently. "I hope he won't put himself out any more about her."

"My dear Charlie, don't say that to him."

"Oh, he is coming here, then, to-night?"

"Yes, he's coming," Henry Fellowes replied; and his wife immediately said to herself, "then Mr. Walter Goring can't be so very much distressed about this missing young lady." Women are always so quick to discover, so prompt to feel, the slights that are offered to, and the indifference that is felt for their fellow women.

The Hurst could scarcely be described as a hall of harmony at this period. The little Prescotts had the art of scattering and diffusing themselves too freely to suit the views of the regular residents. The gift of omnipresence which these children possessed was prodigious, but not pleasant. "Baby fingers—waxen touches" were to be traced upon everything. The bump of veneration was undeveloped in every one of them as yet, so they lavished their little marks of interest as liberally upon the

sacred deposits of patch-work, knitting and darning in old Mrs. Fellowes's basket as they did upon aught else. They insulted Miss Dinah by questioning her curiously as to why she had no "babies, like mamma, and no husband, like Aunt Charlie?" From being inquisitive they grew reflective on these points, and "s'posed," in the most public manner possible, "that she hadn't been able to get one." The baby Prescott—aged eleven months—made The Hurst hideous with his howls at intervals of five minutes. There was a harmless but unrefreshing perfume of tepid pap pervading everything, the voices of the children resounded in every direction, the pretty London nursemaid leaving them much to their own devices while she improved the shining hours with a couple of impressionable grooms and one heartless deceiver in the guise of a footman. In a fit of emotion on her wedding-day, Charlie had to soothe their feelings at parting with her—promised them that they should always do as they liked in her house, and come to see her often; so now that they had come to see her they showed the tenacity of their memories, and were ruthless in their rule. They were what the offspring of youth and age together frequently are—weird children. They

sorely discomposed old Mrs. Fellowes, causing her to hate them for being there, and their parents for bringing them, and Charlie for bringing the parents. Altogether, things were out of joint at The Hurst, Walter Goring could not help feeling when he walked into the drawing-room two minutes before dinner that day.

The effects of the fall were still visible in Mr. Prescott's temper, though not on his person. "I'm sorry you couldn't manage to get across to my place to-day," Mr. Goring said, when he was shaking hands with the man in whose honour he had been invited to dinner; and Mr. Prescott deemed that the remark had a double meaning, and glared at the maker of it vengefully.

But there had been no double meaning in Walter Goring's remark, nor was he conscious of the glaring consequent upon it. He was sorely distraught about his cousin, his ward, the wilful Daisy, in fact; and though there was not actual darkness in his soul on her account, there was anything but sunshine and a desire to make small jokes. He felt sure that she had gone off to some of her mother's people, and he was far from feeling sure that her mother's people's influence over her would be for good

That he would be able to trace her eventually he did not doubt, but this habit of hers of giving recognised authorities the slip would be a sorry one to combat should she grow dear—or rather continue dear to him.

“How does Frank get on?” Walter Goring asked his young hostess when they were seated at the table, and he could speak to her without all the rest overhearing him. Frank was one of those men who are quickly called by their christian names—by men they like.

“He has made lots of studies, and sent them down for us to see and to show you; and he has found an Elaine and a Lancelot,” she answered; “don’t speak of him before Mr. Prescott, please, because Mr. Prescott is unsympathetic on the subject of Frank, and I can’t stand the way he talks of my brother.”

“I will not; your husband has told you about my cousin?”

“Yes,” she replied, and then she paused and crumbled her bread. She felt embarrassed and uncertain as to what answer it would be at once kind and politic to make. If she expressed more horror than sorrow at the enormity of the lost

young lady's conduct, Mr. Goring might deem her more just than merciful. If, on the other hand, she expressed more sorrow than horror, he might think her more merciful than just. In her heart she did think very hard things of Daisy's defection, and could not bring herself to look upon calls of family affection which might have been made, as extenuating circumstances. But she fancied, and fancied rightly, that Walter Goring was judging the offender leniently already, before even he knew the facts of the case. The conversation was changed then, and not resumed until late in the evening, when Walter Goring got a quiet corner in the drawing-room with Charlie.

"It seems," he then said, "that she went five days ago—fancy that! and the stupid old woman she was with has only let me hear of it to-day."

"How's that?" Charlie asked.

"Oh, she was huffed, I suppose; she says she was 'much hurt at the manner of Miss Goring's departure, and is more hurt at my not having communicated with her since;' the fact is, Miss Daisy told Mrs. Osborne that she was coming to Goring Place, and the old lady thinks that I have been showing want of respect for her all these days in

not having notified my ward's arrival and my consequent displeasure with her."

"Then she told Mrs. Osborne a story?"

"A grey lie, evidently; she has a deep-rooted, passionate love for her mother, and I imagine that she has gone off to that mother, whoever and wherever she may be. Forgive me for boring you about it, but I can think of nothing else. I ought not to have come to-night, but I could not resist the pleasure of seeking your sympathy."

Charlie flushed a little. There was absolutely nothing in his words—nothing to which anyone might not have given utterance; but he had a way of saying things a little more impressively than other people.

"I am so sorry," she said—"so sorry for you. Of course I'm sorry that she should be——" Again she stopped. She was going to say she was sorry that Daisy should be so "wickedly indiscreet," but on the whole it occurred to her that she might as well leave the sentence unfinished.

"You don't know her; if you did, you would be very much interested in her, I'm persuaded; she resembles you in many things."

"I should scarcely think that," Charlie replied, decidedly.

"Nevertheless, she does, I assure you; not in person or in mind, but in a certain sort of acquired impatience, and love of novelty."

"Am I to understand that you mean I have an acquired love of novelty as well as acquired impatience?" The tone in which she asked him this showed that she was vexed.

"Yes—are you angry with me?—I did mean it; I have it myself, in a lesser degree than you, now; at one time I had it to a much stronger one."

"And you think it a bad thing?"

"Not at all—if it be kept within bounds."

"Well, mine has been kept within bounds pretty well all my life, so far as my never being able to indulge it goes; and whatever you may think, Mr. Goring, I should never have let it develope in the way your cousin has done—though you say that is what she resembles me in."

"No—you are much less rash than Daisy; you would never throw everything to the winds for the sake of gratifying any strong passion; you would conquer it, or change it."

"Don't analyse me any more, Mr. Goring. I like to think well of myself."

"Know yourself, then," he replied, in a low tone; and when he said that Charlie forgave him for likening her to Daisy; then he went on, "But how about Frank and his 'Elaine'; did he find one at that studio I recommended him to try?"

"No—he only goes there for costumes; he came upon an 'Elaine' by accident in the street, I believe. Oh, no, it wasn't in the street, though, for he says he was rewarded for encouraging native talent by seeing a face that will do for 'Elaine' as he was coming out of the English Opera the night before last. O—and another windfall—he has found a publisher, and his book is to come out as soon as it can be printed."

"That is well. What does he get for it?"

"Half-profits."

"That is not well; he may chronicle the fact, if he ever sees a penny, as the most remarkable occurrence and curious fact of the age."

"He's very sanguine about seeing a good deal more than a penny," Charlie said, laughing.

"So was I once," Walter Goring replied. "I was young at the time, and the publisher who

ushered my first book into the world assured me that fabulous sums would be the result of publishing on that system. I kept a hopeful silence for a year, and then, when I suggested that a modest instalment would be encouraging, he overwhelmed me with shame and remorse by making frightful calculations on the spot, by which he proved that he was out of pocket some £300 by the transaction."

At this juncture, Mr. Prescott, who had been reading the "Times" all the evening, came over and joined them.

"Can that brother of yours keep accounts?" he asked; and his manner of mentioning Frank was so offensive that Charlie kept her head set steadily towards Mr. Goring, and ignored the question. But Mr. Prescott was not to be silenced.

"I say, Mrs. Fellowes," he repeated, "can that brother of yours write a decent hand, and has he a tolerable head for figures?"

"He says 'no' himself. I think his figures are full of life, but he thinks himself that he hasn't a sufficient knowledge of anatomy, so he has gone to South Kensington to study it," Charlie replied, wilfully misunderstanding her brother-in-law.

"I wasn't asking about his daubing," Mr. Pres-

cott said, letting his upper lip down portentously. "I meant, is he fit for a clerk's place? because I see a house I know in the city is advertising for a clerk, and I wouldn't mind backing his application."

"Do you mean that I am to write and tell him this, Robert?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Then why couldn't you have said so," she retorted, "instead of standing off from the subject as if it were a disgraceful one?"

"You don't consider him a particularly creditable one, I hope?"

She rose up impatiently. "Pray don't speak to me about my brother at all, Robert." Then she struggled with herself, and tried to be discreet, and to think that at any rate Mr. Prescott meant well. "Your offer is very kind. I will write and tell Frank of it."

"There is one condition you'll please to make," Mr. Prescott began, and when Charlie asked "what is that?" Walter Goring walked away from them, foreseeing a storm.

"Why, that he gives up his scribbling and daubing; he has dragged his name through the mire enough already. I'll not countenance any more of

it, by trying to put him in a respectable position, unless he promises to give up wasting his time and spoiling canvas and paper."

"You may make that condition yourself. *I* won't."

"How do you expect he is to live? Now when I am willing to give him a helping hand, you throw cold water on my intentions."

"I do nothing of the kind. I simply refuse to throw cold water on his intentions."

"If he lets any absurdity of the sort stand in the way of this, I'll never do anything more for him. I promise you that. I'm willing to do this and give him a chance, and you may tell him so; I will back him up, and my recommendation will be taken—but I won't see him."

"I assure you he has not the faintest desire to see you," the injudicious partisan said, indignantly.

"I should think not, if he has any shame left."

"He hasn't a bit—what has he to be ashamed of, indeed? I'll have nothing to do with your offer or conditions; make them to him yourself, if you are not afraid."

Then she got away from him and took refuge by

Ellen's side. Mrs. Prescott was lying down on a sofa just opposite to a wood fire, feeling very idle, and happy, and sleepy, in blest unconsciousness of the wrath that was simmering in old Mrs. Fellowes's heart at this fresh evidence of the supine indulgence of young women of the modern day. Charlie bent over her pretty sister, smoothing the fair silky hair; as she did so, she whispered,

"Did you hear me quarrelling with your husband, Ellen?"

"I never listen when you disagree, you know," Ellen replied, promptly. "I'm always so afraid that one of you should ask me to say something; so when you begin, I don't listen. How funny that Mr. Goring should be down here, isn't it? everybody says he is sure to marry Mrs. Walsh. But I hope he won't; if we do take this place I had rather not have her for a neighbour."

Charlie left off caressing the fair locks, and moved away from her sister. It pained her to see how entirely indifferent Ellen was as to what would become of her (Charlie), should the Prescotts "take this place." But on Ellen holding out her hand and smiling sweetly, Charlie reflected, "*She* never means to be ill-natured—she is not like Robert;"

so she returned to her place by Mrs. Prescott's side, and that lady continued,

"I should like to go for a very long drive, and take all the children, to-morrow, Charlie; it can be done, I suppose?"

"Oh yes!" Charlie replied.

"May I ask how?" old Mrs. Fellowes struck in.

"Well—really I don't know," Charlie said with a laugh; "but it seems to me that there are plenty of horses and plenty of men to drive them."

"Do you all six or seven of you mean to cram in to one phaeton, for instance?" the old lady continued.

"Allow me to drive you and your sister, Mrs. Fellowes—do allow me," Walter Goring said, and as Ellen smiled assent to the proposition, Charlie agreed to it right willingly.

"When I live here I shall have a pony-chaise and pretty pair of ponies," Ellen remarked amiably. And once more Charlie felt devoid of all natural affection for her sister.

Before the party separated that night, Mr. Goring so managed as to get a few more quiet moments with Mrs. Fellowes.

“I want you to give me Frank’s address,” he said. She wrote it hastily and handed it to him.

“I am going to make a bid for his picture,” he continued; and Charlie smiled upon him gloriously by way of reply, but at the same time said,

“No, don’t do that; Frank would rather not be patronised. A fair field and no favour is all he asks.”

“But I’m delighted with the study he made for it—that figure of Guinevere was exquisite.”

When he said that, Charlie remembered that the figure he considered “exquisite” was the figure of Mrs. Walsh; and then she smiled no more. In fact, she felt that the evening had been a great failure, as she gave him her hand and said good-night to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SYREN SMILE.

IT soon came to be an understood thing that Walter Goring should drive Charlie and Mr. and Mrs. Prescott out every fine day. He had plenty of time at his disposal, and Henry Fellowes was too much absorbed in business matters and miserable speculations as to the future to have time or inclination for anything that did not appear to him to be a work of necessity. There had been another heavy call made upon him, and now the worst was known. It was no longer a question of letting The Hurst and retrenching. He knew that he must sell the old place, and the knowledge made his heart very heavy.

“Do keep square with Prescott, if you can, Charlie,” he said to his wife two or three days after Mr. Goring had dined there.

"Square with him, why I'm sweet to him," she said.

"Yes, I know; but the fact is, I don't want anything to put him off his plan of buying the house and grounds. Goring has made me a capital offer for the land, but he doesn't want the house, you see. It was such a munificent offer that I closed with it at once.

Charlie looked up with sparkling eyes and a crimson face.

"I don't understand, Harry—why should Mr. Goring seem to come forward as a benefactor in this way? I don't quite like it. I would rather have heard that the land was sold to anybody else, or at a moderate price to him."

"I'm not in a position to split straws;—but I was saying, it's not such an easy matter to get rid of a house and pleasure-grounds when there is no farm to go with it down here, so I should be sorry if Prescott gets put off his bargain."

"I won't put him off. Meek is no word for what I have been to him for the last two or three days; indeed, the only thing in which I have ventured to run counter to his miserable little will, was in not making myself the medium of his impertinence to Frank; that I wouldn't do."

"Look at his motive, ~~not~~ at his manner. He meant kindly by Frank, ~~and~~ and Frank has had the sense to see ~~that~~ ^{what} I said. He wrote to Frank himself—curtly ~~and~~ ^{and} I allow—but Frank has answered him straight-forwardly and civilly."

"Does he accept his offer?"

"No; but he gives such excellent reasons for refusing it that Prescott can't be annoyed at the refusal. He says he has had an offer of £400 for his picture, before it's painted, too; it's fabulous are you not surprised?"

Charlie turned her head away and made no reply. She did not like to say, (since Frank had kept his own counsel), that she knew by whom that offer had been made, therefore she said nothing; but she thought, "I wish Walter Goring would not make himself our guardian angel in this way; there is no need for the halo about him to be deepened." When she did speak, it was to say, "Dear Frank! well, I'm glad that he has contrived to satisfy Mr. Prescott," and then she went away to prepare for the drive.

Ellen, being the senior matron, was always given the place of honour on these occasions by Mr. Goring's side, and Charlie and Mr. Prescott had to

make the best of it, and sit her on the back seat. He was a wearisome enough fellow to his sister-in-law at any time, but during his drives he was simply odious to her; and many a time she finds that it was very hard to obey her husband's injunction and "keep square with Prescott."

There are several kinds of people whom it is unpleasant to drive about—to act as coachman to, or even to sit by them while a third person drives. But there are two orders whom it is more than unpleasant, it is almost unbearable, to have with you.

The type of the one order is the man, or woman, who accredits either the horse or you with all manner of malice prepense. If the horse be the object of his distrust, he concentrates all his powers of observation on the noble animal, and is deaf to all you say, and blind to all you pass. He interrupts and worries you perpetually, to ask "if there's not something uncertain in that creature's eye?" or "if he doesn't mean mischief when he drops his ear in that way? and would you oblige him by being particularly careful how you pass things, as he sees that horse is bent on a collision." If, on the other hand, he distrusts the driver, he becomes a nuisance

of a deeper dye. He wants to "ease the horse" at every dip and rise by getting out and walking. He thinks you a cruel monster if you "don't stop him and let him breathe, poor fellow," every twenty yards. He would like nothing so much as to have you up under Mr. Martin's Act if you don't get down and wipe away a pertinacious fly from the tip of the horse's ear with your pocket-handkerchief. He deems you guilty of wickedly overtasking a willing but helpless servant if you drive more than four miles an hour; and finally, and worst of all, he is always sure that your matchless-actioned trotter is "going lame." Now all these things are very hard to endure; but there is a certain cowardice in the first series of offences which calls for contemptuous pity, and a certain kindly tender-heartedness in the second which enlists the sympathy even of the aggrieved. But for the man who, knowing nothing of them, expects and demands impossible feats of endurance and speed from the horses, there is and should be no toleration.

Mr. Prescott was one of these men. He was as unreasoning as an infant on the subject. Accustomed as he was to be wafted about behind those wonderful screws which adorn the Hansoms of the

metropolis, he held it to be quite in the order of things that a similar pace should be maintained for, say twenty or thirty miles without stopping, when a friend took him for a drive in the country. He knew nothing of horses ; they were mere locomotive machines to him, and he held it to be but a puerile policy which ever sought to spare them. "Your cattle don't travel very fast," he would say to Walter Goring, when they were going along at about twelve miles an hour ; and if Mr. Goring, goaded by the repetition of the remarks, increased the pace, Mr. Prescott would resettle himself complacently, and observe to Charlie, "That's a little better, if he only keeps it up ; but he won't."

"No, of course he won't," Charlie would retort. "Why should he run their legs off ? Where do you want to go, that you are so anxious to get over the ground ? Because I daresay there's a train to it, and we could drop you at a station."

"I don't want to go anywhere ; but when a man makes me come out with him, I don't want to crawl along no faster than if I walked."

"Ah ! it's only when you're on horseback that you like crawling," she would reply ; and then Mr. Prescott would look about him discontentedly in

silence, until he fancied he saw another fair opportunity for saying—

“Your cattle don’t travel very fast.”

Or if he was not engaged in finding fault with the pace, or employed in looking discontentedly over the prospect, he improved the opportunity by catechising Charlie as to what her husband’s plans were when he left The Hurst. “He will have very little to live upon, I can tell you that,” he would say, encouragingly. “And I don’t know what he’s fit for, but a farmer; it’s been a very bad business for you.”

“For him, not for me,” she replied. “I’m thoroughly contented, and shall be thoroughly happy if I only find that my husband thinks as little of it as I do. Don’t pity me, Robert.”

She certainly never looked an object of pity on these occasions. The long-sustained excitement of mingled doubt, suspense, and hope, had imparted a certain brilliancy to her manner and face that had generally been wanting in the old “dark days of nothingness” at Bayswater. The knowledge that a great deal depended upon her—that if she seemed faint in spirit and down-hearted her husband would be more unhappy than he was already—deepened

and improved her nature. It made her more careful, more thoughtful and self-reliant. Not in a depressed, saddened way, but in a rich, full, generous one, that made itself manifest in a more glowing physique. She certainly was no object of pity, possessing, as she did, the determination to make the best of things, and the bright belief that things would never be at all worse than she could bear without breaking down. In his heart of hearts Mr. Prescott did think that Charlie should have carried herself a little more humbly in these days—that she should have borne these trials which had come upon her unrepiningly, as became a Christian ; but humbly, nevertheless. He did not wish to be unjust or harsh in his judgment of her ; but “when people haven’t a penny to bless themselves with,” he would say to Ellen, “they shouldn’t hold their heads so high and look so uncommonly well pleased, as Charlie does ; it’s all nonsense her pretending not to feel this downfall at all : she ought to feel it.” Mr. Prescott was a great advocate for a fitting demeanour being observed on all occasions. In his estimation there was no piety in the heart of a man who did not look perniciously sour in a pew. He liked outward and visible signs of things, and

Charlie Fellowes would not soothe him by any signal of distress.

Meanwhile Walter Goring was making a good many. More than ten days had passed, and still there was nothing heard of Daisy. After all her elaborate packing up, she had gone away, taking nothing with her, save the £600 which had been deposited at the bank; but, feeling convinced that she was gone to her mother, Walter Goring did not like to put a detective on her track—a piece of self-denial on his part which saves me an immense deal of trouble in following the devious paths which a detective is popularly supposed to take. But for all this prudent self-denial, Walter Goring was very anxious and unhappy about Daisy, and his signals of distress were clearly visible to Charlie's naked eye.

At last his patience was rewarded. The girl herself came upon him suddenly one evening when he was sitting, as was his wont now, in the room which had been sacred to her—sitting there thinking of her sadly, and reproaching himself with having been false to his charge. She came upon him suddenly like a ghost, so haggard, pale, and sad-looking, that he had not the heart to be severe

to her, when she came almost crouching before him, entreating him to forgive her.

“I will go back quietly, and never want to leave Mrs. Osborne again,” she said, when he had somewhat passionately interrogated her as to where she had been. “I did long so to see my mother; but, Walter, *don’t* ask me about her; only I shall never want to see her again.”

“You have been to see your mother, then?”

“I have seen my mother—yes.”

“Foolish girl! Why not have told me you were going? Would I have prevented it, do you think? I would have raised no barrier.”

“But some one else would. Don’t ask me anything—don’t drive me wild by speaking about it! Let me forget all this—do—do—*do*! She has a husband, you know; and—and——”

She threw herself down on the sofa, crying out aloud, and wailing as a child does in some passionate grief. Then he saw that though her face was worn and wan, that she had gained a fuller, rounder beauty of form since their last meeting. She was more womanly altogether—as graceful as ever—but with a more luxurious grace than the lithe one of old. She had altered the disposition of her hair,

too: instead of being bound tightly round her head, as formerly, she wore it now unbound, pushed behind her ears, and hanging down her back, a rippling sheet of living gold. The fresh arrangement was a new-born beauty to him. He could not feel angry with her, as she was lying stretched before him, weeping in her passionate prettiness.

He went over to The Hurst at once, and claimed Charlie's good offices, and Charlie acceded to his proposal, that she should receive Daisy and keep her until such time as Mrs. Osborne could be communicated with, and her good pleasure about taking Daisy back be learnt. It was also agreed that no one save Henry Fellowes, who knew it already, should be told that the young lady had been a defaulter from the path of duty. "Her romantic love for her mother led her into the scrape, but she shrinks from the subject in such a way that I fancy that love has received some awful shock," Walter Goring said to Mrs. Fellowes, when he was on the point of returning to Goring Place to fetch his ward.

"Tell me? How am I to account for her here?"

"That I leave to you," he replied, promptly,

in the manner men have of appearing to deem a woman capable of coining any story on the spot. "You are sure to account for her in the best way possible under the circumstances. Besides, you are not accountable to any one—are you?"

No, of course she was not; and he was very anxious to throw the onus of his ward upon her—that was very evident. Well, she liked him so much, that she was capable of enduring even misapprehension for his sake. So she prepared herself to defend stoutly, if need be, the appearance of the yellow-haired girl upon the scene, and to suffer a little for friendship's sake at the call of Walter Goring.

Young Mrs. Fellowes had schooled herself well by the time Daisy appeared. She took the elder woman's place—the married woman's place—at once, before that young lady, assuming that it was a thing of course that Daisy should be very much more to her guardian than anybody else. The girl with the sweet voice and the winning ways (ah! how much sweeter they all appeared to Walter than they had been of old!) was not one from whom such a woman as Charlie could stand aloof. Mrs. Fellowes took to her young guest kindly. Daisy's

silvery voice, and feline grace, and look of sad, thrilling experience, fascinated Charlie into a feeling that was stronger than liking at the outset of their intercourse. Mrs. Fellowes had no faith in Daisy's possession of any one of the more subtle and exalted qualities, which Daisy, by an inflection of voice, or a gleam of the eye, or a quiver of the lip, would seem to express almost against her own will. But such is the wonderful influence that well-managed dramatic power has over acutely sensitive people, that though Charlie did not believe in these things, she was carried away, and, as it were, partially intoxicated by them.

And Daisy acted her part well. She was the impassioned penitent—the wrong-doer through right feeling—to perfection. Every line of her flexible form, every varying expression on her mobile face, appealed to all sorts of feelings in those who looked upon her, that caused them to be lenient in their judgment of her. How far the fair beauty of her forehead, and the cobalt-blue of her eyes, and the living gold of the unbound waves of hair, acted upon Walter Goring and biassed his judgment, I cannot tell. However that might be, something about her had inclined the young

guardian so favourably towards his fair ward, that when he left her that night at The Hurst, and went home to Goring Place, with the melody of the last song she had sung them ringing in his ears, he no longer thought the terms on which Goring Place was to remain his at the expiration of the four years after his uncle's death, hard, or derogatory. In fact, there was a fifty-siren power in Daisy's smile now, partly because, when she was not smiling, the cobalt-blue eyes were so very sad.

CHAPTER XV.

DAISY WINS.

DAISY GORING remained for a month at The Hurst, as Charlie's guest, while Mrs. Osborne went through the stages of tremulous anxiety, virtuous indignation, and unforgiving rectitude. Finally, Mrs. Osborne was appeased; she consented to becoming interested and responsible afresh for Daisy, and then Walter Goring found out that he was very sorry that Daisy should be going away from his immediate vicinity.

During that month of her stay at The Hurst, Daisy had entwined herself about his heart marvellously. She had been the motive of his paying almost daily visits to The Hurst, and she had been one of the principal causes of his finding those visits very agreeable—only one of the principal causes, be it understood. The society of young

Mrs. Fellowes had an interest for him, too. But he reminded himself that she was "out of the betting;" and so, being a good fellow, and no would-be Don Juan, he did not care to analyse the interest he had in her, but strove to make himself believe that Daisy had the strongest spell.

Indeed it would have been a strange thing had he stood the test of Daisy's daily presence, and Daisy's desperate determination to please and win him. She seemed to have given up childish things—to have merged suddenly into one of the gentlest, softest, most tractable of women. The defiant manner, and the impertinent expression, were utterly gone, and in place of them there had come a tender twilight, that was specially touching when contrasted with her old sunny, spasmodic habits.

She made no secret of her desire to please Walter. To win his approbation she was ready to do anything now, even to make those educational efforts which had oppressed her so heavily of yore. "I'd burst my brain to satisfy him," she would say to Charlie; and Charlie, though the saying it caused her a painful sensation in the throat, would tell the truth and reply, "No need for that; he is satisfied enough with you already."

Once—a day or two after she came back—Mr. Goring strove to assume his rightful authority over his ward. He told her that there must be an end of this affectation of mystery, that he insisted on knowing who, and what, and where her mother was? She lapsed into stubborn silence then—a silence so dark, dogged, and determined, that none of his entreaties could move her from it. Defiance he could have mastered, open refusals to tell him anything he would have routed—but with a woman who could hold her tongue he felt powerless. Finally, he had to declare his own defeat by telling her that he would not press her further, but that “if she loved him,” she would prove her love some day by giving him her confidence. That appeal touched her—not to confidence, but to such tears and caresses that she made him forget that he had any cause of displeasure with her. She sat down on a low stool by his side, and leant her head on his shoulder, and slipped her thin hand into his, and made the love he had seemed to question manifest to him in a thousand ways. It was almost as if the soul of Vivien had come back and entered into this girl, Charlie thought, when on Walter’s departure Daisy went to her, and recounted the

scene with such accuracy that Charlie wondered what was real about her (Daisy), and whether she was acting now or then. In short, irresistibly impelled as Mrs. Fellowes was to watch the evolutions of this girl and to take an interest in her progress, fascinated as she was by Daisy's voice, and grace, and matchless gift of seeming, she distrusted Miss Goring's perfect integrity in many respects, and specially did she doubt the sincerity of Miss Goring's love for her cousin.

For Daisy was redolent of that air of small trickery and intrigue which disgusts another woman who is capable of detecting it, more than a larger, bolder sin would do. She employed the artifices of artlessness too freely for one so clear-sighted as Charlie not to find her out. It disgusted and offended Mrs. Fellowes to see Daisy adopt a sort of pleadingly caressing, half-childish manner towards Walter—to see her hanging on his arm and pressing her cheek against his hand, and even twisting his brown curls round her white, taper fingers. It disgusted and offended her even more to see that he rather liked all this than otherwise, and that half-childish as the manner was, it was rapidly winning him to think Daisy the one woman

in the world. Yet for all the chagrin and annoyance she felt daily almost, Mrs. Fellowes was very sorry when Daisy left her, and this partly because the girl had exercised over her the Lamia fascination, and partly because Charlie would rather have watched the growth of the danger than know it flourishing away from her.

At an early stage of their intercourse, Daisy had taken the very surest means of averting anything like antagonism to or interference in her plans from Charlie. Miss Goring had a mind fully capable of grasping all the contingencies of such a case as this. She knew herself too well to believe that she could successfully deceive Mrs. Fellowes; therefore she resolved upon confiding in, and so appealing to, Mrs. Fellowes' honour. "I am very fond of Walter," she said to Charlie, the morning after her arrival. "I didn't feel inclined to let myself fade out of his recollection by staying at Brighton; he would have come to think of me as a little girl."

"Was it *that* which made you cause him all this anxiety?" Charlie asked, holding her head a little more stiffly erect than she had held it before.

"Yes," Daisy replied, coolly. "Different people take different paths to the same place very often ;

I wanted to make him think a great deal about me, and I have succeeded. I want him to fall in love with me now, and I'll succeed in that if he is not interfered with."

"I don't think you need fear any interference," said Charlie.

"No, I don't think I need now, for Mrs. Walsh is away, and you are—married." She dealt the last word out like a shot, and she had the satisfaction of seeing Charlie wince. Charlie felt conscious herself that she had not heard it entirely unmoved, and that through her inopportune twitch of nervousness she had put herself in Daisy's power.

"There is no occasion for you to take that fact into your calculations," she said, and Daisy replied:

"Nevertheless I do, for Walter thinks very highly of you. I believe you might set him against any one. Mrs. Walsh tried and failed; but I made her smart for it." Then she laughed, and recounted what took place during that journey to town which has been already described, and Charlie listened and found the recital to the full as interesting as Daisy desired she should think it. "It was very unfair of her—very wicked, as she had a

husband alive then: don't you think it was?"

Daisy wound up with.

"Do you mean that it was wicked to come to Goring Place, and unfair of Walter—Mr. Goring, to like her?"

"No; but unfair and wicked to try and come between us," Daisy answered. "And do you ever call him Walter to his face? You said his name so naturally."

"No; of course I don't."

"I'm very glad of that. I never shall be—because you are always sure to behave beautifully—but I could be jealous of you."

"You'll please to remember that I am married," Charlie replied, gravely. The conversation had taken a turn that was peculiarly disagreeable to her. She seemed to herself to have suddenly come down to a very low level of girlish folly; therefore she threw herself upon her stronghold—her dignity as wife, and regained her position.

Or nearly regained it. She felt that, after all, it was but a drawn game—that she had not checkmated her daring young assailant, when Miss Daisy replied:

“Yes, I know; but isn’t it funny that we should both have seemed to think it necessary to recall that fact when we were talking of Walter?”

From that moment, never by word, or look, or gesture, did Charlie hint to Walter Goring that his cousin was not all that a man could desire the girl he is thinking of falling in love with to be. Indeed, she eschewed private conversation with him on the subject of Daisy, dwelling solely, when he forced her to say anything about the girl, on the witchery of her ways, the fascination of her fair face, and the thrilling joyousness of a voice that grew clearer and more bird-like daily.

Indeed, gradually Charlie eschewed private conversation with him altogether on any subject. It came about quite naturally, this change in her custom and desire. The time was approaching for them to leave The Hurst, and Henry Fellowes began to be subject to severe fits of despondency. Mr. Prescott had bought the house and grounds, and was very anxious to get possession of them. And Ellen longed to have the house clear, in order that she might refurnish—a fact she considerably impressed upon Charlie in every letter. The cottage which Mrs. Walsh had hired went with the land

Walter Goring had bought, so she suffered no inconvenience through change of landlords.

At last Henry Fellowes applied for and got the situation of steward to so much of Lord Harrogate's land as was kept in the family about Deneham. There was no house for him, though, on the estate. Accordingly it was proposed and carried, greatly to poor Charlie's horror and disappointment, that the whole family should migrate to a small house in the village, unite their incomes, and live together.

But only to her brother did she express a word of what she felt. Before her husband she exhibited neither distrust nor down-heartedness; but to Frank she wrote :

" While there was a prospect of a separate establishment I almost rejoiced in the convulsion which has thrown us out of The Hurst. I would willingly have gone to Australia, as Robert Prescott proposed we should do ; but this going into a small square house in that miserable High Street, Deneham, with Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah, is rather hard. The walls are so thin, that I shall hear their voices from morning till night. However, other people have stood worse things. Forgive me this one

howl, dear Frank, and tell me if the accompanying story is worth reading? If it is, revise and get it off for me—not under my married name, though. If it failed, all the females of the house of Fellowes would revile me into my grave. You know that Mr. Goring's cousin has been staying rather more than a month with me. She goes back to Brighton to-morrow; but not for long, I fancy. She's attractive, and he's attracted. How about the picture? I hope you haven't made Lancelot look anything but rather ashamed of himself. It was what old Mrs. Fellowes would call 'most unblushing,' to have that talk with Guinevere and then to go off and let Arthur fling one arm about his neck and call him

‘Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most love and most affiance.’

“The auction is fixed for this day three weeks, and we have to give a fine luncheon—that's the custom here. Fancy, people coming to eat at our downfall!

“Believe me, dear Frank,

“Your affectionate sister,

“CHARLIE FELLOWES.”

The day after writing this letter, Daisy left her, and, as was said before, when it came to the point, Charlie was very sorry to part with the girl. She was touched by the way in which Daisy hung about her, with the tears in her bright blue eyes. "You have been so good to me, Mrs. Fellowes; you have done more than any one else in the world to make me happy," she said.

"Except Mr. Goring," Charlie replied.

"Always excepting Walter—poor Walter!" Daisy said, putting her hands up to her forehead and leaning her elbows on the table. After a few moments' pause, she went on: "I may as well tell you to-day as write it to you to-morrow—as I surely should, Mrs. Fellowes—Walter asked me to marry him, last night. I have won the game I came down to play." She looked up, and smiled faintly as she spoke.

"You have won much too honourable a man to speak of it so lightly," Charlie replied. Then she remembered all the circumstances under which she had accepted Henry Fellowes' offer. True, she had never done a single thing with design to win or attract him; but she had taken him in such utter indifference, that she felt not from her lips could Daisy be reproved in justice.

"Poor Walter, poor Walter!" Daisy went on, putting her head down between her slender hands again. "Shall I tell you all he said, and how he said it?"

"No, no," Charlie replied, hastily; "pray don't. How can you?"

"How can I?—Oh! capitally, I am sure. I couldn't help thinking he looked so handsome, and he spoke so beautifully that it was like an opera scene, though the words were English. Do you know, I could hardly help singing my answers," she continued, laughing. "Wouldn't he have been surprised? He didn't go on his knees."

"I should think not," Charlie replied, pettishly. "Come, Daisy, do take your coffee. You will have to start without breakfast if you don't; for Harry is going to drive you to the station, and he never lets anyone be late for a train."

"All right," Daisy rejoined. "I have seen him very near to kneeling before Mrs. Walsh, I assure you."

"Mrs. Walsh never knelt to him. There's no occasion for the adoration to be on both sides," Charlie said.

"And you mean that I have half-knelt and

seemed to wholly adore?" Daisy rejoined, looking up quickly. "Poor Walter! he does think I love him so much; it's that that brought him down, I know; but I'll go on just the same all my life, Mrs. Fellowes. It wasn't real at starting, I allow; but it's a thing to grow, isn't it?" she looked keenly at Charlie as she spoke.

"Daisy, you don't mean that it has all been sham?" Charlie asked, almost piteously. She liked Walter Goring so much. It seemed to her such an awful thing that this girl should go to him as his wife, seeming to love him so desperately, and not loving him at all.

Daisy wheeled round on her chair, and bent her face over the back of it, turning the long waving mass of bright yellow hair towards Charlie.

"I know you'd never be mean enough to try and break off the engagement, however much you like him. I dare trust you."

"You may trust me; but this is—oh! Daisy, it's horrible! Don't do him the bitter wrong of marrying him if you don't love. You don't know what it is; you don't know what it is."

"Do you?" Daisy asked, suddenly facing round; and Charlie sprang up, exclaiming,—

“You turn off from the subject—don’t speak about it any more.” Then she added, more gently, “Forgive me: I had no right to offer you advice, and—you may trust me, Daisy.” In her self-abasement, Charlie looked upon herself as a fellow-sinner, though she had never fooled a man by a feigned love.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST DAY IN THE OLD HOME.

SUCH of my readers as have had personal experience of the difficulties and disagreeables attendant on removing, with a large family and a limited income, from a large house into a small one—and such alone—will read this chapter with interest; for it chronicles veraciously, and at some length, the Hegira of the Fellowes from The Hurst.

It had been decided that enough of the furniture should be kept to furnish the small square Deneham house of which Charlie had made irreverent mention in her letter to Frank. The work of selection, in itself, was therefore an arduous one; and it was made more arduous than it need have been through the eternal diversity of opinion which prevailed on the subject of each article between Miss Dinah and her mother.

These ladies had, with an amiable willingness to be ready in time—a willingness that was praiseworthy in itself when isolated, but that could not be isolated, and therefore became a detestable nuisance—commenced packing up about a month before there was the slightest occasion for it. “If we never make a beginning, we shall never get the few poor things we are suffered to retain, together,” Mrs. Fellowes would say, vigorously unsettling the standing order of several things in constant use, and judiciously mislaying them. Miss Dinah perfectly agreed with her mother’s proposition, but not with her mother’s manner of carrying it out. Mrs. Fellowes’ earlier measures were weak, but inoffensive; Miss Dinah was of a more martial mind. She desired to resort to extreme measures at once—to have all the carpets up and all the bedsteads down, in order that they “might see what they had, and know what they wanted,” she said.

“Don’t you think,” Charlie once mildly ventured to suggest, “that it will be as well to leave the things as they are till the men come to pack them? It will all be done at once then, and you won’t be worn out beforehand.”

“My dear, you know nothing at all about it,”

her mother-in-law would reply ; and Miss Dinah would add, "No, indeed ! I am not going to have the men touch that beautiful glass and china that we have never so much as used for the last twenty years : I shall pack that myself."

"Wouldn't it be as well to sell it, as it's never used ?" Charlie hinted.

"No, it wouldn't," Miss Dinah replied ; and after that Charlie contented herself with watching proceedings. "You can make copy out of it all by-and-bye," Frank replied to her, when she wrote and told him some of these minor miseries.

At the time, Charlie had very little chance of making copy out of anything ; for the library was never safe from raids from some one or other, who would come to look for some missing or wanted article that was supposed to be buried in one of the cavernous closets of the room. Moreover, she had to answer business letters for her husband, and to act as his secretary generally ; for the poor fellow's troubles had made him less clear-headed than of old. She did not know to what attribute it ; but at times he seemed to be in a haze, and to be weak of purpose both in manner and words. She did not know to what to attribute

it, but the sight of it sent many a sharp pang through her heart. When it came to the wind-up, Charlie was useless. "I never could keep an account in my life," she exclaimed, piteously, to Walter Goring one day; "and my husband tells me that he relies almost entirely upon my aid in making everything clear—what has been sold, and what spent, and what's due. I can write any number of letters, but the very sight of the bills and account-books drives me mad."

"Don't go mad; ask your husband if he will let me help him."

"Oh! Mr. Goring, why should you be so very kind? Why should you waste your time in such a very dreary way? No, no; we must do the best we can."

"Of course you must—but you will let me do the little I can? I would do anything in the world to serve you, Mrs. Fellowes," he continued, warmly; "as I can only do it in these trifles, you must suffer me to try. It's such a short time," he continued, in a lower voice, "since I presumed to give you advice about the management of your life, and now I see you teaching any man a lesson who likes to take it; bearing up and behaving as few men do indeed. I

hardly know which is my strongest feeling—admiration for the change in you—the development, rather—or regret for the cause of it.”

“Don’t pity me, and don’t praise me,” she replied, “you know we women stand either very badly ; but you shall help my husband, if you will.”

He did help her husband.. No clerk bound down by duty and the hope of promotion could have worked more unremittingly at the loosely-kept chaotic accounts that accumulated with rapidity just before the wind-up of Henry Fellowes’ affairs. It was a wearisome, thankless office, this labour of friendship for Charlie, which he had undertaken ; but he felt himself to be well rewarded by her gratitude, and the increased knowledge he gained of her gratitude being a thing worth having. He had resumed his old place with her, almost the place of the sympathetic confidential friend he had seemed to be before Daisy came. To him she even confided the undefined dread which she had sometimes on account of her husband. “I wish we were out of this,” she said, impetuously, one day ; “I wish my husband could get at once into his new occupation. Doesn’t he sometimes strike you as seeming stupid now ?”

Walter Goring coloured a little as he replied :

“He thinks about this miserable business too much,—he gets a fit of depression whenever he thinks about you.”

“But he shouldn’t—men should not break down about a mere money matter.”

“My dear Mrs. Fellowes, I have seen the noblest minds break down under the want of a five-pound note.”

“That’s pitiful,” she replied.

“It may be so, but we cannot argue about it; it’s a great fact, whether it be a pitiful one or not.”

On one other occasion, before they accomplished the move from The Hurst, Mr. Goring, on his way over to see them one afternoon, met Charlie walking along in the side path that led to the blocked-up lane into Goring Place. There were dark marks under her eyes, and her cheeks looked drawn and pale. “If it were any other woman than you, I should say you had been crying,” he said, as he got off his horse and joined her.

“Turn back with me, the other way. I can’t go home yet,” she replied, hastily. “Crying—yes, I have been crying till I have got such an attack of neuralgia in my head, that I wish I had never been

born. All the pleasure *I'm* ever likely to have in life can't compensate me for the maddening pain I'm enduring, and have endured for hours."

"I'm very sorry." It was all he could say, therefore it was all he did say; but he walked along by her side, and it was pleasant to her to feel that there was one human being near to her who did not insist upon saying right things at the wrong time. She was suffering terribly, poor girl; suffering from one of those agonising mutinies in the head, when all the nerves rise up in array against each other—when thought, and sound, and light, one and all affect the sufferer to an equal degree, and set all the head machinery scrunching one part against the other—when a specially lively demon seems to seat himself upon the bundle of nerves on the left temple, and hammers away with both feet upon some very sensitive strings that run from that place to just behind the eyes—when the brain seems to be pressing forward, and there is a great feeling of pulpiness at the back of the head—when meaningless words repeat themselves unceasingly, and lines of poetry, that have no special application to anything on earth, insist on being pronounced with emphasis—when, in fact, it is just touch and go

between temporary insanity and permanent madness, and one can feel nothing but pain. As he glanced down at her, he saw that the slight "Cain's mark," as she herself called the light line on her forehead, had deepened into a plainly perceptible division, and he was shaken by his pity for her agony, and his own incapability of relieving it.

"Mrs. Fellowes," he said at last, "do come home; take my arm, and come home."

"Don't make me talk," she replied; "speaking makes my head grate against itself." He had never heard other than bright, nervous accents from her lips before; the change to this low tone of suffering despondency was exquisitely painful to him. He felt, too, that he could do nothing; he knew that she did not ask him not to speak in order to urge him to do so. Suddenly she turned round and spoke again:

"I had better get home as fast as I can, Mr. Goring. I have tried to walk it off, but it won't go." Then she put her hand on his arm, and he led her back to The Hurst; and when Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah saw them approach, they agreed that it did not look well in Henry's wife—very far from well, they were sorry to say. "Evidently went

out to meet him," Miss Dinah said, walking away from the window in virtuous haste, "and has been crying, I should say."

"Can it be about his engagement?—perhaps they have been talking about that?" Mrs. Fellowes rejoined.

"I shouldn't wonder; there, do you hear the way she has rushed upstairs; what would poor Henry think, I wonder?"

"Poor Henry" was incapable of thinking about anything just then. It was early in the afternoon, but he was sound asleep on the sofa in the library. "It has been a bitter bad business. God help her, poor dear girl," Walter Goring thought as he went into the room, and stood looking at the recumbent figure for a moment. Then he turned and went out, without waking Henry Fellowes, and rode back to Goring Place.

They had not been, as Miss Dinah supposed, talking about his engagement. It was a subject that they very seldom did talk about, much as they saw of each other again in these days. Indeed, it was a subject that Charlie cared very little to talk about. It was not the most pleasant topic in the world. Very few women do care to discuss the

love of a man they have liked, or could have liked, for another woman. In the abstract it is easy enough to contemplate his future devotion to "other lips and other hearts," but not in the concrete ; not when it is concentrated upon one individual.

And in this particular instance, Charlie had not the poor comfort of despising the lover of another woman. When a man swears eternal allegiance, and backs the vow with all the eloquence of eye and tone, to a woman one week, and she hears the next that he is offering duplicate vows to somebody else, a very brief contempt for what is so lightly lost and won, is all she is apt to feel ; and contempt is the best refrigerator when one is left lamenting. But Walter Goring never had offered vows, mute or spoken, to Charlie, and Charlie had never had the remote possibility before her that he ever could come to do so. Nevertheless it was hard for her to feel as she did, that he, the friend she valued most in the world next to her brother, was bowing before an unworthy shrine.

For, married woman as she was, her husband had ceased to be the friend she had hoped in their honeymoon days he would be while their bond lasted. Nemesis was hard upon her indeed ; deservedly

hard, she told herself. Every single thing which she had hoped to gain in this marriage, which she had made without love, had failed her. The competency, the comfortable home, the position in the county as the wife of a landed proprietor—all these were gone; and now the friendship for Henry Fel-
lowes, which, in all honesty, she had resolved upon keeping so pure and undefiled, that it should only be a little less than the love she could not give, was going too. An atmosphere which she did not care to analyse, but through which she could not pass, was growing thicker between them each day, and she stood alone, both as woman and wife, to such a degree, that she feared the extent of her solitude becoming known to the only two who might have solaced her in it—her brother and Mr. Goring.

Perhaps there is nothing more disagreeable than the last day in an old home. In Martineau's charming picture, though the pain and misery of a fine old family household breaking-up is placed vividly before us, the artist has avoided painting the pettinesses which always add stings to the big grief. On that canvas the stately side of sorrow is shown to us in the grand old matron lady, and the heart-

sore refined wife ; and there is redeeming grace and light-heartedness about the debonair handsome young spendthrift who has brought them to this pass, and who sits with his gallant little son at his knee, uplifting a glass of sparkling wine on high, and toasting his parting glory. A poetic, if a painful part of the day has been selected. But in real life, the last day in the old home is all pain and no poetry generally.

At any rate, the poetry of it was not apparent to Charlie as she roamed about through the dismantled rooms the day they left The Hurst. In her heart she was very sorry for all the Fellowes ; she knew that this break-up must cut them to the core. But she could scarcely express her sorrow for them without seeming to include herself in the list of unfortunates, and this she specially wished to avoid. The small recompense she could make to the man she had married, for having married him solely because he was a great gentleman of fortune and position, she would make. It was not much, she thought, but she would make it as perfect as it might be ; never from her, by word or deed, should he or any one else learn that she gave so much as one regretful thought to the vanished geniality, fortune, and place.

It was the least she could do, but she would do that thoroughly.

At last all the things they were to take were separated from all the things they were to leave. Waggons full of the former were dispatched under fitting escort to the house in Deneham which they were to occupy henceforth, and the rest of the things were arranged in lots by the auctioneer's men. Then Henry Fellowes and his mother walked together for the last time through the house that was no longer theirs; and Charlie could not go with them, being in a state of excited pity, and fearing that they would misunderstand her, and fancy her pity was for herself.

If the early part of that day was worrying, the latter part was simply woeful. The tears of his mother and sister combined with many glasses of sherry which he took with the good intention of "keeping himself up," made Henry Fellowes as lachrymose as a woman might have been. Servants—even servants who had been in the employ of the family for a few months only, and who had been utter strangers to them before—deemed it incumbent upon them to bedew the melancholy occasion, and speak in the falsetto of sorrowful

sympathy. The incoming people—the Prescotts—were perpetually alluded to disparagingly, and dark doubts were expressed as to what they would do with divers rooms, and how they would presume to alter standing arrangements. Already the Prescotts were looked upon as personal foes of a peculiarly black hue by Mrs. Fellowes and all those who desired to stand well with her. Charlie felt that she herself was regarded with an increase of distrust by reason of her relationship to them. Only Miss Dinah insisted upon speaking of them as anything save deceitfully dangerous traitors.

“The place had to be sold;—and it’s just as well that they should buy it as any one else,” she said. “I don’t see that their having stayed here before, makes a bit of difference.”

“I only know, that never, as long as I live, will I put my foot inside the gates again after I leave it to-day,” the poor old lady would reply, weeping sadly.

Some faint feeling of satisfaction shot through her mind as she said it; she fancied that the Prescotts would feel this as a fit and dire punishment. The not putting her foot inside The Hurst gates would be so very much to her, that she could

but imagine that it would also be very much to them.

“And I shall not take it well if Henry’s wife flaunts about here with her sister as if nothing had happened.”

“You can’t expect her to cut her sister, mother?”

“Ah!—we’re told we can’t serve God and mammon,” Mrs. Fellowes replied, irascibly.

Then she went on her way again, making a few more faint preparations for getting away, and telling herself, sadly, that there “would be more wall-fruit than ever probably this year—the trees had been so well pruned last—but that never a bit of it would she touch, though they might beg and implore her to do it.”

It was all very small and trifling, no doubt, these weak womanish outbursts of contemplated revenge. But the sadness of it outbalanced the smallness and trifling.

At last they got away, drove over to Deneham in the carriage behind the horses that were to be sold at the auction. Every horse was to go save the old brown hunter which had dropped Mr. Prescott in the ditch. Even the old Major was to

be sold, as Henry Fellowes had learnt from Lord Harrogate's outgoing steward that one horse would do all his work. They reached the new house about six o'clock, and found all the wrong things put into the wrong rooms. And their new life commenced.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AUCTION.

THE morning of the auction dawned clear, bright, and fine. The sun shone upon the demolishment of all of the old at The Hurst.

“If I were you I wouldn’t go over, Harry,” his wife said to him, as he was restlessly stalking up and down in their own room waiting for his horse to take him over to The Hurst. “Take me out for a drive instead,” she continued.

“Nonsense; I shall go. I don’t want people to think I’ve any shame in the sacrifice,” he replied moodily. “I’ll go over and show myself amongst them—one of them for the last time; after to-day I drop the Esq., and am only Lord Harrogate’s steward.”

She liked and sympathised with the spirit that dictated the move, but the move itself did not com-

mend itself to her taste. That he should so deport himself did chance throw him in the way of any of his own order, was well and good—was only manly, and what should be, in fact. But to her mind it savoured of bravado to go and put himself in their midst at the auction. However, she did not attempt to dissuade him further. What a man determined on doing he should do, she thought; she had no inclination to develop any latent infirmity of purpose by using her womanly wiles on the man she had married.

This first day in the new establishment bade fair to be as unpleasant as any she had yet passed during the term of her sojourn on earth. The curtains were not fitted to any of the windows yet, and the blinds were all painfully new and glaringly white. The sun was rather bright this morning, consequently there was not a square inch of shade in any one of the small front rooms—and to these she was restricted, Chaos and Miss Dinah reigning in those with a northern aspect.

It is never very hopeful work getting things that were not designed for a place adjusted in a place that was never intended for them. The little rooms looked oppressed by the weighty old-fashioned fur-

niture. When the dining-table and sideboard were finally settled, there was great difficulty in inserting the smallest person between the former and the walls all round.

“One will have to sit in the grate, and the other on the window-sill, and the rest will be cruelly compressed,” Charlie thought, as she noted the effect; and then she spent an hour or two in giving frantic little pushes and tugs at the table in order to make the most of the bit of room that was round it. “When the contents of the huge waggon that’s still unpacked are brought in, the house will burst,” she thought at last, as she steered her perilous way through the little hall. “We’ve brought so many things to make us comfortable, that there will be no room for any of us.”

After a time, it not being in the nature of things that twenty-two can labour long under inactive depression, she picked out the smallest bits of furniture she could find, and tried to make a shrine for herself in the drawing-room, which was to be her special domain. It had been ordained by old Mrs. Fellowes that as Henry would be away at the auction all day, they should content themselves with a loose sort of luncheon, and no dinner; that

they should, in fact, as Charlie phrased it to herself, commence their new life like pigs. But she acceded to the proposition partly because she felt it would be useless to combat it,—she was determined to make every concession that might help to keep the atmosphere of the new household serene. Accordingly they partook of their viands in a sketchy way early in the day, and dispersed and resumed their several efforts at adding to the confusion immediately after doing so.

Charlie laughed to herself as she stood late in the afternoon surveying the effect of what she had been doing. After a tolerably hard day's toil, she had succeeded in making the place look just comfortable, nothing more; and she remembered the plans she had made for combining English comfort with Oriental splendour in the lobby at The Hurst, when she came there a bride. "All that's over for ever,—and serve me right too, for I did think so much of that sort of thing," she said to herself, cheerily enough; and then she laughed again, and thought "what lots of faults Ellen will find with all I have been able to achieve here, never thinking that I'd gladly do more if I could; what a world of trouble such a nature as Ellen's must save its pos-

sector, to be sure." Then, having done all she could, she turned away to go and dress herself, in order to look as fresh and pretty as it was possible for her to look when her husband came home, for the day, though not very disagreeable, had been very dusty.

Meanwhile, the first day's auction at The Hurst was drawing to a close. It had been well attended, for Henry Fellowes' teams of cart-horses were celebrated, and he had been careful to have all the latest improvements in implements on his land. Moreover, in addition to its being well known that all the things to be sold were good, there was much sympathy felt for the sellers. Men who had not the remotest intention of expending a penny, were heartily willing to go and drink a glass of sherry to Henry Fellowes' future fortune; and he being there took a glass with them as a matter of course, until after a time he came to regard his future fortune alternately as the brightest and blackest of things. Then they would turn away from him, and gather into knots and discuss the future owner, Robert Prescott, Esq. "The king is dead; long live the king." It was only the old, old story; Henry Fellowes had no right to be cut by it. But he was cut—to the soul.

Walter Goring was there, bidding for things, of the use of which he had not the remotest conception, and lavishing his money for the good of the Fellowes in a way that made him a marvel to some people. "That young fellow who has come in for Goring Place seems to be going a-head," they remarked, when his nods became chronic; "he's going to try experimental farming and novel-writing together." Then they cited the example of the author of "Mr. Midshipman Easy," who honoured Norfolk by residing in it for the last few years of his life, as an instance of how "that sort of thing" might be expected to succeed.

Three or four times in the course of the day did Walter Goring seek Henry Fellowes and urge him to go home. But Mr. Fellowes would not go home; at first he merely refused to do so energetically, but after a time he refused in the excited declamatory style. "Why should he go home?" he asked; "it would all be the same a hundred years hence," with other irrelevant riders, which caused observers to shake their heads benignly as he passed, and prophesy unpleasant things regarding him as soon as he was out of hearing. At last the late owner of The Hurst took to demon-

strating that a man was a man for all that, meaning apparently all that he had lost, and all that he might lose; and everybody agreed with him, and advised him "to go home."

At last, as the afternoon was closing in, Walter Goring induced Mr. Fellowes to have his horse round and make a start for home; and then even the old hunter seemed ashamed of the three or four futile efforts which his master made to hoist himself into the saddle after he had got his foot in the stirrup. Several of his old friends shook their heads and said it "was an awful thing—his heart was broken, poor fellow!—and he might be expected to go altogether wrong now," as he rode away—the truth must be told—in a maudlin state of intoxication.

Walter Goring rode with him, not for the sake of the man who could seek oblivion from anything, however bad, in such a source, but for the sake of the high-hearted girl at home. Mr. Goring was beginning to understand the best of Charlie Fellowes, but he knew well that she was not cast in the patient Griselda mould, and he did not know how she would stand this last drop in her cup of sorrowful experiences. "If she breaks out, everything

will be gone," he said to himself as he rode slowly along by the side of her husband, who was sitting crumpled up over the fore part of the saddle, misdirecting the horse with heavy hands. Walter Goring dreaded seeing her, but he dreaded even more her facing this sight which he was escorting to her alone.

When they reached the house, the young, refined, fastidious man of letters, whose worst sacrifices to Bacchus had been made in bubbling, brilliant wines, which only made him sparkle more, got off and helped the man who seemed absolutely weighted with dark, glowing liquid, from his horse. Then they got into the hall, or passage, of the little house, and it was so small that Henry Fellowes seemed to be oozing out of it into every room. Walter Goring opened a door quickly, and got the master of the house into the room that was to be held sacred to him and his wife; got him into this room by a lucky chance, and then looked up and saw Charlie rising from her desk by the window, and coming forward to meet them.

He saw, as Henry Fellowes sank on the sofa and Charlie came forward, even in those few minutes, Walter Goring saw that the soul of the woman was

in revolt. He would have given a goodly portion of the worldly goods of which he was possessed to have been able to couch some phrase which should have the effect of soothing her at first. Of soothing her and of lessening the shock of disgust which she was experiencing. But he could say nothing—he could utter no word—he could only feel that it would have been wiser on the whole had he suffered Henry Fellowes to stumble into the house alone.

It must be borne in mind, in partial extenuation of the following scene, that Charlie Fellowes had never been for one half-minute what is called “in love” with her husband. She had never experienced for him any of that romantic feeling which—whether it be founded on fact or fiction—whether it be based on the real or solely on the ideal—still enables a woman to endure and forgive even to seventy times seven. Such a feeling had never obtained, for the briefest period, in her heart with regard to the man she had married. She had never done more than like him very much. She had believed him to be faithful, and generous, and manly; she had known him to be very truly and fondly attached to herself—and this belief and knowledge wrought in her the determination to do more

than her mere decorous duty to this man ; she could not accord him the unreasoning, blind devotion of love, but he should have from her the devotion of a friendship that only was not love—friendship such as the saints in heaven might envy. Her heart could not be his ; that was their mutual misfortune—to the full as great a trial and misfortune to the unloving wife as to the unloved husband. Her heart could not be his. But her sympathy, her counsel, her hearty co-operation and interest in all that concerned him, her unswerving comradeship through the campaign of life, her earnest endeavours to brighten his home and make their union as happy as possible—all these she had sworn to herself to render him so long as they both should live.

But now he had brutalised himself, and no saving memory of old romance rose up to temper the loathing that she had for her lot, as she looked upon him lying there a helpless log before her, trying to articulate a request that she would “ come and kiss him.” Kiss him ! the convulsive shudder with which she recoiled from him and the idea was an answer that made its way to Mr. Fellowes’ brain even through the fumes of the wine.

“It has been a fearfully trying and exciting day,” Walter Goring whispered; “quite enough to upset any man—let him keep quiet for a time. I’ll say good-by to you.”

He moved towards the door, and as he opened it, waves of disgust, of dread, of sickening aversion to being left alone in this way, surged up and overwhelmed her judgment. She sprang after him, and exclaimed—

“Don’t go, Mr. Goring!” and the passionate piteousness of her tone made him wish more than ever that he had not come in. She was too pretty to play the part of outraged wife with impunity, especially to a select audience of one impressionable man.

They went across the hall into the dining-room. Mrs. Fellowes and Miss Dinah were still upstairs unpacking, and the room looked cold, and chill, and cheerless as they entered it. “You think too much of this, Mrs. Fellowes,” Walter Goring said, trying to speak in a light, careless tone, as Mrs. Fellowes, interlacing her fingers with angry vehemence, and giving vent to a series of frightened, dry sobs, commenced walking up and down. There was no affectation about her agitation; she was horribly

frightened in the first flush of the realisation of the undefined dread which had haunted her for some time; and even worse than the fear she felt, was the blinding sense of shame. She sickened at the thought of being left alone with the man who had soaked all semblance of manhood out of himself. "If he takes me in his arms and kisses me, it will kill me," she thought; and as she thought it a shiver passed through every fibre of her being, and she turned again to Walter Goring.

"What *am* I to do. Everything is gone. I can't bear it—I won't bear it," she said, wringing her little hands together, fiercely.

"Do calm yourself; this will pass. You will forget it, or if you remember it at all, you ought to remember at the same time how the poor fellow has suffered to-day."

"Forget it! and what if it comes again and again!" She sat down, and put her arms and her head down upon the table, and he saw the big blinding drops of rage and shame pouring from her eyes. He went over and stood by her, and bitterly regretted that he could not, that he dared not, soothe her. He was sorely tempted to raise that bright bent head, and rest it on his heart. But he

did not yield to the temptation. Perhaps in the sight of the God who has not seen fit to portion out passions alike to all, Walter Goring's conquest over himself at that moment was not less meritorious, than the absence of any such feeling of being strongly moved towards Charlie, would have been in a colder-blooded man.

All at once she lifted her head and looked round at him, as he stood by the side of her chair. The outburst of feeling had rather exhausted her, and her voice was very low and very touching, he thought, as she said—

“What must you think of me?”

His arm was over the back of her chair, and as she moved it pressed against her shoulder. “Think of her?” He did not dare to answer that question even to himself, as with all an impulsive woman's disregard of consequences, she curved her hand and put it on his arm, saying—

“When you go away, what *shall* I do? I'm so utterly wretched.”

Then the strained cord snapped, and Walter Goring seized the hand, flung his arm round her waist, and for one moment held her to his heart, and his lips to her face. Then they started apart,

and he stood with bowed head before her, saying humbly—

“I have been mad—forgive me. I shall never forgive myself.”

“It was all my fault,” she sobbed; “my fault and my misery. I forgot you were not the brother you have seemed.”

So she saved them both from deepening the spell they, assisted by fate and circumstance, had been weaving for themselves; and he, bitterly penitent as he was, followed the hint she gave.

“Dear Mrs. Fellowes, be tolerant to your husband during this phase; it will pass directly and be forgotten; you will, won’t you? You will let me still think of you as all that is bravest and truest and best in woman; and if I can ever serve either of you, you’ll remember that only Frank has a stronger fraternal interest in you than I have.”

“Yes, I will.” She hesitated for an instant, and then went on, “Now, I’ll go back to my husband: his mother, his poor mother and sister mustn’t know anything of this; and if I don’t see you again, for a long time, good-by, Mr. Goring. God bless you.” She paused and held out her hand, and as he took it the versatility of her nature asserted

itself, and she laughed, and added, "If it were Daisy taking leave of you after that, she would sing—

'Be happy, my brother, wherever you are
Good speed to your courser, good luck to your bow.
But will you not?—will you not think of me still
As you thought of me once long ago, long ago?'"

"Long ago and always. My opinion of you is not likely to alter," he replied, heartily. Then he went away, and she returned to the room where she had left her husband in her burst of irrepressible disgust ten minutes before. She had recovered now, and she was humbled by the memory of the imprudence into which her emotion had led herself and another. She was quite ready to take up the burden of life again, after giving one fleeting thought to what might have been. She thanked Providence for that she had been enabled to make the termination of that impassioned scene so prosaic—prosaic even as her future life should be.

She sat by the fire, thinking, struggling, and resolving, until a servant came and knocked at the door to tell her tea was ready. When she went in, she told Mrs. Fellowes that "Henry was asleep; quite tired out, poor fellow." "I think he might

have come and let me know how things went, and I think you might have let me know he was in before," the old lady said angrily. Then Miss Dinah said she would take a cup of tea in to her brother, and Charlie exclaimed, starting up, "No, no; I'll do it." She could not bear that they should learn what additional cause for grief they had in seeing the effect their misfortunes were having on a son and brother so believed in and trusted. "I'll spare them while I can," she thought. Accordingly she begged them not to disturb him at all by going in that night, and they obeyed her request, indignantly assuring each other that it was as they had said all along—Charlie was trying to separate them from Henry. She knew that such was their thought from the extra stiffness of their demeanour towards her, and she accepted it as part of her punishment for her many sins, one of the worst of which, she told herself, was her so having wrought upon the feelings of a man who had never made any pretensions to being a St. Kevin, that she had caused him to be for a moment less noble than himself.

The following day Walter Goring left Goring Place for Brighton. He stayed a day or two in town, in order to see Mrs. Walsh, whom he had not

seen since his engagement. She was staying for a week or two with some friends at Kensington, making preparations for a lengthened trip abroad. He wanted to get her to go with him also to Frank's studio, to see the picture wherein that warm admirer of her beauty had immortalised her as Guinevere; therefore when he called he was glad to find that she was at home and alone. But the interview they had was too long to come in at the end of a chapter.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

“SHE SHINES ME DOWN.”

UNTIL Walter Goring found himself awaiting Mrs. Walsh's appearance in the drawing-room of the house in which she was staying, he had had no idea of the extreme dubiousness he felt as to her approbation of his choice. He knew that she did not like, and he knew that she would not like his marrying, Daisy. But the thing which caused him the most present anxiety was the doubt he had whether she would let that dislike appear, or whether she would accept Daisy as inevitable, and for his sake make the best of her.

For his sake ! and why on earth should she do it “for his sake ?” He could not help asking himself this as he stood there waiting. Why should she smile upon and accept Daisy's attainment of the position for his sake—now ? It was no use affect-

ing to forego all the former facts. His heart had played fast and loose with him as far as these women were concerned, and by this means he had seemed to play fast and loose with Mrs. Walsh. It had only been in seeming; in reality he had never loved her less or more than while her husband lived, and the feeling had been differently named. But she was not a woman to forgive the smallest slight—the tiniest trifling—though it were only in "seeming," he told himself. Of all the women he had ever met, she was the one most certain to "scorn, and let him go" utterly, did she fancy that he had given ever so small a tug at his chain. When she knew him gone as lover, she would never keep him on as friend, especially after that last hand-kissing business down at The Hurst.

All this he told himself as he stood there waiting for her, and all this he was perfectly justified in believing, judging her from the side of her character which he had studied most assiduously. That side was the one in which love and pride were blended together deftly as are the gorgeous hues in an Indian shawl—he scarcely knew where one ended and the other began. But she would teach

him now—she would show him that she knew where to draw the line; she would teach him that since he had developed this fatal faculty of loving whatever he looked on, he had made a poor and paltry mistake in ever looking at her.

Again: would the girl for whom he would lose that undefinable essence which had made his existence sweet for so many years, repay him for the loss? Walter Goring had never “gone in for killing.” In a light, easy, give-and-take way he had played the game that is carried on everywhere under so many different names—suffering his heart to seem every woman’s toy for an hour or so, but never going far below the surface. Mrs. Walsh had said of him in a moment of anger, that “he was a dreadful flirt;” but this was an exaggerated charge. She was the only woman to whom he had ever exhibited any depth of devotion or earnestness of feeling. To every other one he had shown clearly that they were but the Cynthias of the minute, and if after that showing feminine vanity led them into error, the error could not in justice be charged to the account of Walter Goring.

But between Mrs. Walsh and himself the bond had been widely different—always, be it understood,

with the full knowledge and hearty concurrence of her husband. He had made her the repository of his hopes—of his temporary defeats—of the numerous minor matters which go so far in making the happiness or misery of every man’s life. She was the first woman he had ever known well—the first woman, that is, a full knowledge of whom was improving to a young man, for he never had a sister, and his mother had died when he was a boy. Through her influence he had gradually withdrawn himself from the set of clever, idle, dissolute men with whom he associated on his first entrance into London life—artists who never painted—authors who never wrote—men all of them with expensive tastes and limited exchequers, and very few good women friends. His intimacy with the Walshes had been very good for him; he could not go into her presence fresh from an atmosphere of rattling recklessness, he had felt immediately. So he had withdrawn from the haunts and the habits which he could not discuss with her, while still too young for either to have tainted him.

Her influence had been very good for him, and he had loved her very much for the exercise she had always made of it, and for its beneficial effect upon

himself. She had been to him that which he had been wont to call her, "his goddess," the purest saving power of his life. He had loved her very dearly, but within bounds which he had never anticipated seeing broken. When [they did break, he had gone on thinking of her and loving her in the old way, for man is a creature of habit. Any change in her would be hard to bear, and would Daisy have the power to make him indifferent to, even if not forgetful of, the subtle charm which had been over him so long?

He knew, or thought he knew, Daisy thoroughly by this time. He was well aware that he would have no calm of love with her. As a wife she would probably give him even a more lively time of it than she had given him as a ward. Her love for him was very warm now—he thought; but he knew that it was a flame that would require a good deal of fanning to keep it as bright as at present. He foresaw that she would be jealous and exacting—that she would want to cut him off from Mrs. Walsh and Mrs. Fellowes, even if they did not cut themselves off from him. He knew that Daisy was one whom it would be stark madness to rely upon to any great extent; her love of acting little parts,

and her wild desire for admiration would require a very light, firm, watchful hand and eye to keep them in check. All this he knew about her, yet, at the same time, she had so fascinated him that he did not regret it very much. There were drawbacks to perfect felicity in their union doubtless; but these were more than counterbalanced by her passionate love for him, and the expediency of a marriage with her.

Meanwhile, as he thus ruminated, Mrs. Walsh was preparing herself to meet him—and the preparation was not easily made. For many years, from the time indeed when she, a mere girl—but such a steady-minded, self-reliant one—had been London's beauty and Ralph Walsh's bride—she had been accustomed to feel herself to be first friend and counsellor to Walter Goring. He had brought his young man troubles, his maturer cares, and at last his success and fortune to her—and to her husband—to discuss, till at length she had come to love him as a brother while Ralph lived. At any rate, if the love she had for him lacked any of the fraternal element, she never acknowledged that it did, even to herself, and when first she made her appearance in these pages, she

would, as was then averred, have been quite capable of seeing Walter Goring take upon himself the trammels of holy matrimony, and of being grandly gracious to a bride of his of whom she approved. That she might have been rather difficult to please in the matter of his choice is extremely probable; but to the idea of his marriage in the abstract she would have been sweetly acquiescent.

Since that time things were altered. Ralph Walsh was dead. In the face of reason, nature, and facts, some people will persist in deeming it monstrous that a widow should wed again. With the right or the wrong of their doing so the mere narrator of the story of the life of one has nothing whatever to do. I can only say, that having loved Walter Goring for long years, within the strictest bounds while her husband lived—having become interested in all that concerned his welfare, keenly alive to all that was good in him, thoroughly convinced of the perfect integrity of his regard for herself, and perhaps a little vain of the influence she had had over him so long—having done and been all this for years, she slackened the boundary line when her husband died, and suffered her heart

to tell her that all would deepen into something more exquisite still—an' only he willed it so.

When she replied to his letter announcing his engagement she did so in [such brief, and at the same time such unconstrained terms, that they told him nothing, save that, as ever, she wished him well.

"DEAR WALTER," (she wrote), "In this first moment of hearing it, together with the confusion I am in about taking all I may want, and nothing superfluous abroad with me, I can scarcely say whether I am surprised or not. Of one thing I *am* sure, and that is, that you will believe that my hopes for your happiness are as hearty as my regard for you is warm.

"Yours always truly,

"HORATIA WALSH."

Yes, he was very sure of it; but the assurance scarcely comforted him while he sat awaiting her this day.

At last the door opened, and she came in—a Juno in deep mourning. A very hurricane was raging in her heart, and it acquired a wilder force

the instant she read in his eyes that he was rather more than agitated. But she kept her proud beautiful face composed, and there was no sign of trembling in the hand which she held out to greet him.

"I am so glad that I have found you at home," he began at once.

"Even if I had been out I should have written to your address and asked you to come again," she replied cordially; "it will be so long, probably, before we see each other, and so much will have happened before then," (she tried to smile as she said this, but found that, on the whole, it would be safer to fight her battle without any waving of flags) "that I would not have let this opportunity pass on any account."

"Nor I," he answered. "You hold to the plan you hinted at; you are going on the Continent?"

"Yes; immediately almost. I shall not be here to see you married, Walter; when is it to be?"

Having come to the end of her sentence, she essayed another smile here, and this time she succeeded in making it play over her face with tolerable naturalness. "To see you married"—to somebody else; they are not pleasant words for

a woman to utter to a man she loves ; they seem to gnaw.

“In May,” he replied. “Come back and see the last of me.”

He lifted his eyes to her face as he spoke, and the tone was the old well-known, well-loved, pleading one that had been for her ears alone for so long—that would fall on the ears of another woman with a higher claim to it henceforth. He was not a flirt ; but he really had a great deal to answer for.

“That will be impossible,” she said, and then she paused, for she was afraid that at another word her voice might falter, and she did not want to falter before him.

“Will you come with me to-day to St. John’s studio ?” he asked. “I want you to see a picture he is painting for me.” Then he told her about Frank having taken her as Guinevere, and what the subject was.

“And where is his studio ?”

“Only in Sloane Street. Let us walk up to it through the Park.”

For a few moments she thought that the trial would be too long sustained to be gone through to the end as well as she had gone through it up to

the present juncture. Then she remembered that after this day she might never see him again, for if these feelings lived she could never see him as Daisy's husband.

"Yes, I will go; I shall like to see it," she said. "How many years is it that we have gone the round of the studios together before the Academy opens, Walter?"

"I forget. I only hope that we shall go the round of the studios for a good many years to come."

She did not echo his wish. The prospect of going round in the train of his wife was not one of delicious bliss.

They walked up through the Park and came out into Sloane Street, where they soon found Frank's number. But here disappointment awaited them. Mr. St. John was not at home. Could they see his painting-room, Walter Goring asked. The landlady was exceedingly willing that they should do so, but their approbation of this affability of hers was marred by their immediate discovery of the fact of Mr. St. John having locked the door and taken the key away with him. Accordingly they were compelled to return unsatisfied, and defrauded

of those subjects of conversation which they had both legitimately anticipated being supplied with for the walk home.

It had all been very well going up. They had commenced when they started talking about Frank, and his happy faculty of being able to do everything, and bright-hearted reliance on everything he did succeeding. "He is very clever, with a dash of something that almost amounts to genius," Walter Goring said of Frank. "If he lives, and doesn't wear himself out, the world will hear a good deal of Frank St. John."

"Yet he doesn't seem to be very much in earnest; he seems to take all things very lightly, at least I thought so."

"That external lightness conceals a prodigious amount of go."

"It's the same, then, with his sister Mrs. Fellowes," Mrs. Walsh remarked.

"Yes, exactly the same; she's a queen," he continued enthusiastically. "There's a fate—there's a crew for such a girl to be thrown away upon." Then he told Mrs. Walsh about the auction, and its effect on Henry Fellowes, and the scene he had witnessed after it, but he refrained from all mention

of his own share in the scene. Mrs. Walsh could not be sympathetic; she had not witnessed the scene, and so could not realise it.

“What nonsense her talking in that way; ‘she would not bear it,’ and ‘she could not bear it.’ Why, she’ll *have* to bear it.”

“And she will bear it well, I fancy,” he rejoined. “She spoke almost recklessly, but she will never act recklessly.”

“You thought her like your cousin at one time; do you think them alike now?”

He shook his head. “I have left off drawing parallels between them. Mrs. Fellowes is one in a thousand, and I know very well that Daisy has numerous duplicates.”

This was the sole mention that had been made of Daisy during the walk up; but on their return Mrs. Walsh spoke of her again.

“Tell me, Walter,” she began, abruptly, “does Miss Goring know the terms of that sealed letter? or secret trust? or whatever you call the illegal nonsense?”

“No; she knows nothing about it.”

“I was in hopes that she did.”

“Why?” he asked.

"O! because then I should have been better satisfied that she is going to marry you for pure love of you; the fact is, Walter, I'm as jealous as a mother for you."

"I don't think you would doubt Daisy's love for me, if you saw her with me," he replied. He had no intention of being cruel, but the picture those words conjured up, caused the ground to quaver under her feet; that sentence went to her heart like a sharp knife—and made her tongue curl itself in parched speechless pain—and caused a dull thudding in her throat that interfered with her breathing. But she walked along as erect and stately as ever in her grand Juno-like beauty, making no sign of the agony, of the bitter nauseating agony that was gnawing at her the while.

There was such horrible pain in that walk home. She could not bear to speak of her life to come, for he, the man by her side—the man who had made the poetry of her existence, would not share it with her. So silence came upon them; and silence under the circumstances was very dangerous. Walter Goring could not help thinking what a miserable man Swift must have been whenever he thought of Stella and Vanessa, since he, all blame-

less as he but could hold himself, was so miserable now.

“You must come in with me, Walter?” she said to him, when they were nearing the house. “I have something to give you.”

He went in, and once more she left him waiting for her while she went up-stairs to take off her walking-dress, and to get a little jewel-case. She arrayed herself very carefully before she went down; she meant it to be her last interview with Walter Goring, and so as a priestess would robe herself for an important sacrifice, she robed herself for this.

The grandeur of her beauty struck him vividly as she came into the room again. She was a woman with one of those long slender throats, who can turn their heads over their shoulders without distorting their frames or faces in the least. So, now as she turned to shut the door, she curved her head round like a swan, and said to him,—

“I cannot be at your wedding, Walter; but I have something to send to your bride.” Then she seated herself by a little table and opened the case, and he stood close over her, looking at the gift she disclosed.

It was a broad band of diamonds and emeralds for the arm, and as she held it up to him, he said something in deprecation of the value of the present ; but she checked him hurriedly.

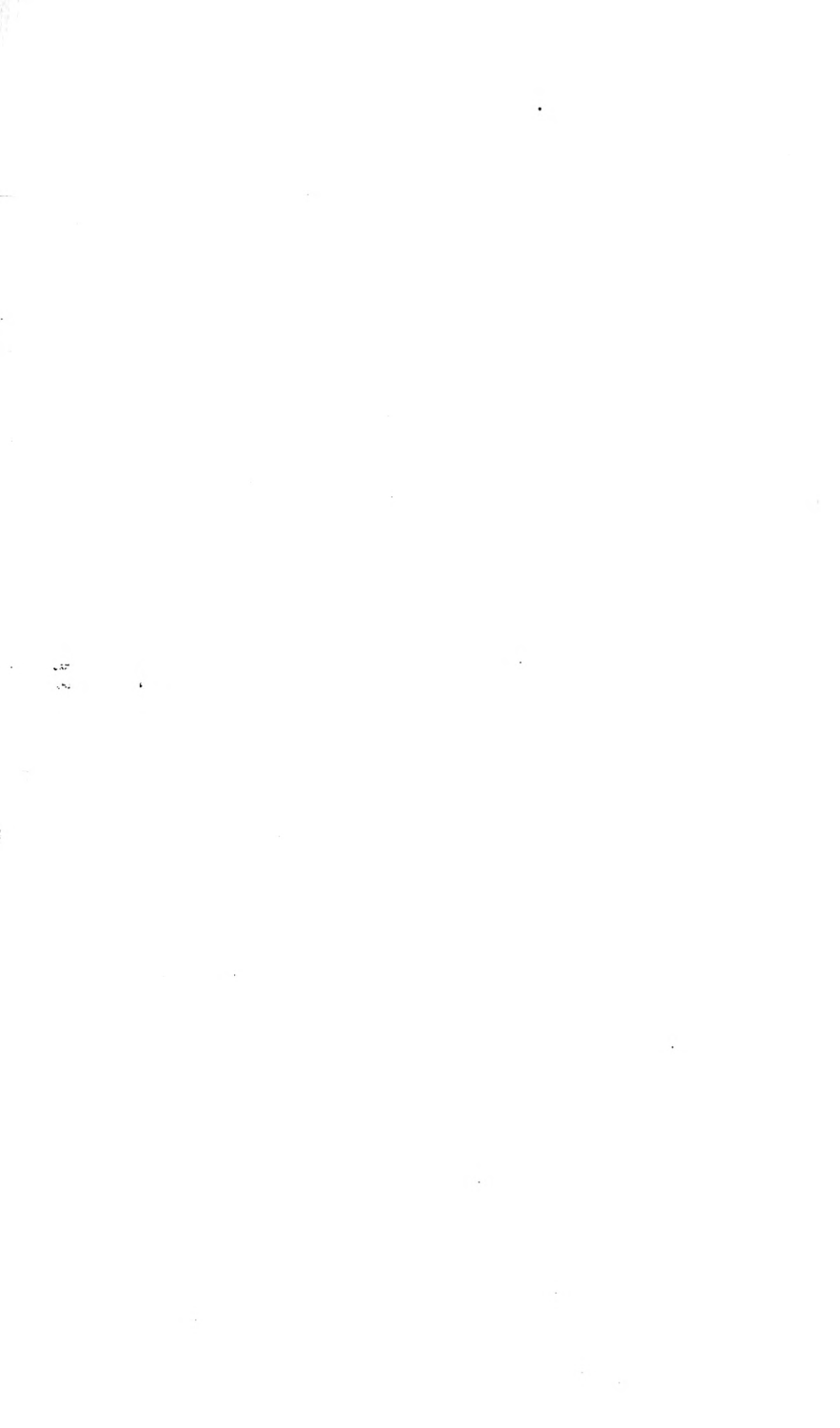
"Pray don't say anything of that sort. I shall never go out of mourning ; therefore, I shall not wear coloured stones. Take it, Walter, and think as little of the gift as of the one who gave."

The reproach dropped from her lips almost without her knowledge, and in uttering it she threw away her strongest weapon, the reserve she had hitherto maintained. "Take it, Walter," she continued, "give it to her ; tell her she shines me down."

She rose up as she spoke, and held out both her hands to him. As he grasped them and muttered something about her having been so pure a guiding star to him, that none could ever outshine her, she said, "God bless you, Walter—for the last time," and went away, leaving him with the diamonds in his hand and her words ringing in his ears. "For the last time," she had said ; had it really come to this—was he to realise so painfully that there was truth in that axiom, "A man that's married, is a man that's marred." Even as he

thought this, she turned back and gave him her hand and said "Good-by!" once more. It was so hard, so very hard to part; she could only do it by degrees after all.

END OF VOL. II.







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